



*By the same author*

Poems and Songs

Londoners

Pleasures of the Flesh

The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters

The Gavin Ewart Show

An Imaginary Love Affair

Be My Guest!

The First Eleven

No Fool Like an Old Fool

Or Where a Young Penguin Lies Screaming

All My Little Ones

# The Collected Ewart 1933–1980

*Poems by  
Gavin Ewart*

Hutchinson

London Sydney Melbourne Auckland Johannesburg

# The Collected Ewart 1933–1980

*Poems by  
Gavin Ewart*

Hutchinson

London Sydney Melbourne Auckland Johannesburg



Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd

An imprint of the Hutchinson Publishing Group

3 Fitzroy Square, London W1P 6JD

Hutchinson Group (Australia) Pty Ltd

30-32 Cremorne Street, Richmond South, Victoria 3121

PO Box 151, Broadway, New South Wales 2007

Hutchinson Group (NZ) Ltd

32-34 View Road, PO Box 40-086, Glenfield, Auckland 10

Hutchinson Group (SA) (Pty) Ltd

PO Box 337, Bergvlei 2012, South Africa

First published in this collection 1980

© in this collection Gavin Ewart 1980

Set in Bembo Roman by

D. P. Media Limited, Hitchin, Hertfordshire

Printed in Great Britain by The Anchor Press Ltd

and bound by Wm Brendon & Son Ltd,

both of Tiptree, Essex

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Ewart, Gavin

Collected poems of Gavin Ewart.

821'.9'12

PR6055 W3

ISBN 0 09 141 000 2

*To Margo*



# Contents

Introduction	9
Early Poems (1933-39)	10
<i>Poems and Songs</i> (1939)	21
Other Pre-war Poems	69
War Poems (1940-46)	72
Poems (1946-64)	79
<i>Londoners</i> (1964)	86
<i>Pleasures of the Flesh</i> (1966)	121
<i>The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters</i> (1968)	166
<i>The Gavin Ewart Show</i> (1971)	204
<i>An Imaginary Love Affair</i> (1974)	242
<i>Be My Guest!</i> (1975)	253
<i>The First Eleven</i> (1977)	287
<i>No Fool Like an Old Fool</i> (1976)	302
<i>Or Where a Young Penguin Lies Screaming</i> (1977)	348



## *Introduction*

This collection is a collection – and not a selection – of my poems. This is not because I consider them all equally good but because I have aimed at completeness. I have also borne in mind the fact that a poem that has ceased to have much merit for me may have hidden admirers who would be disappointed not to find it.

The only book of my verse not included here is the latest, *All My Little Ones* (published by Anvil Press Poetry). This should be regarded as a pendant to the bulky work now before you, consisting as it does entirely of short epigrammatic pieces.

# Early Poems (1933–39)

## *Phallus in Wonderland* \*

'I shall draw strange fowl from this foul nest.'

WEBSTER

*Grammarian:*

'Prima coitio est acerrima'† (Terence);  
In 1889 I first encountered woman  
And copulated unsatisfactorily  
Owing to ignorance.

*Antichrist:*

The soul rises  
Persistently, like yeast;  
The curate eagerly pursues  
The prurient attitudes  
Of the full-grown priest.

*Critic:*

Rudyard Kipling has  
'Immortalized' Surrey;  
Euripides lies entombed  
In Professor Gilbert Murray.

\* This poem, written shortly after my seventeenth birthday and published by Geoffrey Grigson in *New Verse*, was excluded by me from my first book of verse, because of its immaturity. It shows very clearly the influences of T. S. Eliot, the Pound of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, and Ronald Bottrall. Auden, in early 1933, was not yet making his presence felt.

† *Prima coitio est acerrima* means 'The first meeting is the hardest.' I used the quotation because *coitio* (coming together) suggests coition in English. The Grammarian's little speech was inspired by the case histories in Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. I discovered the volumes of this great work, hidden with their backs to the wall, in a bookcase belonging to a Naval Officer in 1932

Cherries in brandy are  
Passive to the eye and docile,  
Time, Place and Genius  
Re-appear as fossil

Water, falling from the air,  
Is hard earth's solvent,  
The wind blowing over hardens both  
And shows the way the mole went

Ice deals in details,  
Picturing hard and subtle,  
It is the back-thrown ink-cloud  
Obscures the deep sea cuttle

### *Grammarian*

'Non cuivis homini  
Contingit adire Corinthum '\* but I have hopes  
And I am writing a commentary  
(With marginal notes) on Dr Marie Stopes

### *Ancient*

I have driven many parasangs into the wilderness  
Of human inconsistencies and fears  
And have discovered no oasis  
Undried by passage of years

My borders are stocked with pelargonias  
Whose distended fragrance hits the sense  
Pleasingly, pleasingly  
The drowsy hum of the Romantics  
Is in keeping with the reliquiae  
That straw my sanctuaries  
And the sundial has an old inscription  
That induces reveries

\* *Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum* means 'It's not every man who has the luck to get to Corinth' Corinth, in the Ancient World, was the City of Pleasure — just as Paris was for the nineteenth century Anglo-Saxons



*Student:*

While the Persians  
Undoubtedly were given to  
Several interesting perversions

I consider  
The political customs of England  
Were, in growth, far rapider.

*Ancient:*

When the end comes and my sensoria  
Cannot pick up Wordsworth on any wave-length  
The ironists will say: 'Sic transit gloria  
Mundi.' I shall not have strength  
To quote the appropriate Tennyson  
And soon I shall be 'nearer Nature'  
Than all the ornithologists and flower-enthusiasts.

*Chorus:*

Let him drink hellebore,  
Since he will be,  
As he knows, in time  
An usufructuary of Ge.\*

*The Sapient Man:*

The application of standards  
Has led me to be called an 'intellectual snob'  
By the hairy partisans of true Unwisdom,  
Whose clash of fives gloves serves to them as swords,  
While the movement of the ball is their delight  
As it finds its secret corners fishlike  
In its unenclosed aquarium.

*Person:*

My friends are pleasant.  
How long they will continue so  
I do not know,

\* Ge is the Greek for Earth Hellebore is the herb that the Greeks  
believed would cure madness

Yet if there were Hell or Heaven  
I would wish them out of the fiery lake  
For sentiment's sake.

*Young Man*

Only three buttons on her bosom  
Winked at me in the light,  
Yet I thought of Herrick  
Half the night

Many theologians have donned  
The triple-breasted waistcoat of The Word  
Without inheriting the wit  
Implied in the verb,

And have obscured, unsolved, the problem  
Of Individual and Fate,  
The waistcoat in fact, though ornamental,  
Was lunatic and strait

*Observer*

The hair over the forehead, the straight body,  
The upward eye  
May show proficiency at golf or swimming  
Yet betray a man to women

All things in love continue flowing,  
The pleasure-going  
Lip, haste-bitten, will bleed  
And men emit seed

*Public Schoolboy*

Though as lustful as a stallion  
I behave like a scullion,  
Kissing housemaids in linen-cupboard or pantry  
Is the height of my gallantry

*Poet of the Generation:*

We are swept away by a strange tide.  
Did Mr Eliot at Hyde  
Park Corner in 1917 boarding a bus  
Foresee it? He was not born in us

But we in him.

He gave us a voice, straightened each limb,  
Set us a few mental exercises  
And left us to our own devices.

At first we ran up trees in distraction,  
Mimicked his every action,  
But now are back on earth again.  
Sheltered by a gourd and sane.

*Individualist:*

How can a man 'live fully'  
Sealed in his psychic cell  
Or in a narrow playground  
With entrances: Sight, Taste, Hearing, Touch, Smell?

*Scientist:*

. . . Evolution, you see, has no appeal –  
No human interest,  
So that no woman in the gallery would clap her hands,  
Stamp her feet or sweat in her vest.

*Poet:*

Blowing my trumpery trumpet,  
Looking for hounds for my horn,  
Shall I revert to ancient themes  
And wish that I'd never been born?

No use: for man is created  
Lower than angels and higher than hedgehogs.  
Nor daydreams nor comfort sustain him,  
Romantic poets nor fur rugs.

*Major.* ★

Novels by ladies  
From York to Cadiz,  
Deified Appeal  
From Bombay to Louisville,  
Cinema and press and evening dress  
Bring conversation to the Officers' Mess

*'Love Thy Neighbour As Thyself'*

I cannot live in another man's skin  
I cannot grow fat when he grows fat,  
Grow thin when he grows thin

I cannot live in another man's flat  
I cannot live in a spider's web  
Or the hole of a mole or a rat

I cannot feel beyond myself,  
Feel with the fly in its agony  
Or the spider unlow on a shelf

I am shut in, short-circuited,  
And of this kingdom the ruler  
My own brain in my own head

*Promiscuous Person*

A car's head-light seen behind trees,  
Erotic light behind a blind  
Can re-create the lust of the body  
In the pantheistic mind

*Psycho* †

A man puts his hand down a woman's dress,  
Presses a curve,  
The curve on the graph of his loneliness

★ The *Major* doesn't give a very accurate account of talk in an Officers' Mess Eight years later I found this out for myself

† The *Psycho* is a psychologist or psycho-analyst – not a psychopath

A man without a woman is quite alone.

She at his birth

With inconstant light as a star shone.

She, as his lover, was predestined

To dance with him,

Shaking his cocktails in the West End. . . .

*Ancient:*

Deliver me from fornication and hockey.

Let me not see the fool leaning over my fence.

The best sweet peas are Surrey's and Kent's

And a horse cannot win without a jockey.

These are axiomatic, desires and riddles;

Eighty years of pushing the pedals

Has led me to these as my goal.

Now I cannot see the light I sought

But am blind, as a mole.

*Youth:*

There is an energy that works in me,

Drives me like an engine or a tin me.

This is the force that would split my coffin-boards

If its loss were not the occasion for those funereal gauds.

*Sensualist:*

Perfume can make me love,

Challenging like a glove,

Meeting me face to face,

When flight is disgrace.

Touching can make me lust,

Before bright senses rust,

Pushing me over the cliff

Before my lips can say 'If'.

Hearing a softened voice

Presents me with a choice:

Shall I believe what it says,

Or we go our ways?

Seeing can make me ache,  
But not for a tooth's sake,  
Ache with the whole of me,  
Knowing I am not free

*Ambitionist*

I should like to see  
Better become best,  
I should like to see the savage  
Wear both shirt and vest

I should like to see  
The Daily Press  
Taking its cues  
From the weekly reviews

*The Great*

We do not see the resurrectory gibbet;  
We do not hear our brains dissected in the lecture room,  
When our equestrian statues are dusted  
We do not feel the feather-broom

The lack of sense can bring  
Certain definite compensations,  
We cannot read the ironic obituaries  
Tastefully written by our near relations

*Ghost of the Ancient*

Now the gardener's boy who  
Makes water on my careful flower-beds  
Is more than me and yet we both complete  
The nitrogen cycle For soon I'll rot,  
Manure for daffodils and tulips –  
But the young continue to be young  
And the old continue to be old  
If two faces differ it is only by centimetres  
And one cannot show mysteries to a foetus

If a millennium come or a triumph  
I shall be under the hooves of the horses  
Although I too have lived and been  
The man in the saddle is not my kin.

# Characters of the First Fifteen\*

Match v. Cheltenham. Won 17 - 6.

Come here!

Let me whisper the glorious news in your ear.

We're proud,

We all know the tune and we're singing aloud.

Let us praise Knight,

Handing off and showing fight,

And Stephen,

Successful where the ground is uneven,

And Balfour-Paul,

Clever at dribbling, quick on the ball,

And Hamilton's hook,

Powell like a giant in a picture book,

Crawford and Wilk-

inson, as tough as an elk,

Hastings too,

Always ready with something to do.

And as for Cable,

We don't praise him for his manners at table

But for cutting through,

For kicking right-footed and left-footed too,

And Rawlence

For passing backs when they're off their balance,

And Auret,

Attacking an arrow, defensive a turret,

\* This poem, written in October 1933, shows the influence of Auden's verse in *The Orators*. It was set for the *Wellingtonian*, but never appeared because the Master, F. B. Malim, vetoed it. Perhaps he felt that the reference to Cable's table manners was uncomplimentary (it was not intended to be) or the unseemly smoking of the ushers' wives disturbed him. The Wellington rugby team of 1933 was considered by all to be the best school team in the south of England.

And Maude,  
Crossing the line, a barbarian horde,  
And Charteris and Birch,  
Falling and kicking as high as a church,  
And finally Forster,  
More energized than any poster

Now ushers' wives  
Are smoking and having the time of their lives,  
Success  
Hangs round the buildings like fancy dress,  
A pardon  
Is granted by tutor walking in garden,  
Elated,  
To-night our success will be celebrated

## *'One Incomprehensible'\**

Moles go without eyes  
About their business,  
The claws in the dark  
Are like lovers' hands in the park

Sensation makes men sing,  
Dance like toys on a rubber string,  
But itself cannot be held,  
Is a reed, not a tree to be felled

\* The phrase 'one incomprehensible' is from one of St Paul's Epistles, which was being studied in the original Greek by the Classical Sixth in 1933



Time may be measured by clocks,  
The wind turns weathercocks;  
Touch leaves no record, can dissolve or fix  
And is impermanent enemy to statistics.

Touch may be cocktail-shaker to the blood  
Or morbid as a sod;  
Pledge it, if you must; it will  
Be there in the glass for good or ill.

# *Poems and Songs (1939)*

## I

The primal stone of the sheep-walls of Yorkshire, the  
iron cross hard to the hand,  
These have given me pleasure  
Prior to the first seizure  
Of love in my adolescence

The snowflakes falling on the travelling train, the frosted  
lines  
Straight to no purpose,  
The track of the porpoise,  
The plumage of pheasants

And these I enjoyed, yet always expecting the touch of a  
woman to be like the sun's  
Or a wave's eddy  
On my body  
Experience dissents

## II

Birds have their feet in air;  
Chestnut trees root before they flower  
My noise is twittering,  
A nostalgic thing

The black houses by railway lines  
That divide and go as I travel  
Cannot give me root  
In their clinging soot

Thus I am nearer the birds,  
Going with, and only, the wind;  
My continual fate  
Is to fly but not to migrate.

### III

Breathing but not believing,  
Clutched by the hairy pores of skin,  
I've no way out but no way in.

Pulled, now, taut  
By a brace of fanning birds;  
But only air that girder girds.

For here cathedrals falter,  
Rise O slow  
Towards the sun they do not know.

### IV

#### *No Flowers by Request*

The thing finished is perfect.  
Death perfects in point of fact  
And I am always a fraction  
Of my coming perfection.

Submerged, the submarine can see  
Past waves with its exalted eye.  
So, in the grave, upon my eyes  
These sores may fester, memories.

But, tissue touched with right reagent,  
The past might well appear a pageant  
Coloured and moving in its plane  
Without the third dimension, pain

## V

### *Audenesque for an Initiation*

Don't forget the things we taught you by the broken  
water-wheel,  
Don't forget the middle-classes fight much harder going  
downhill,

Don't forget that new proscriptions are being posted  
now and then,  
Dr Johnson, Dr Leavis and the other Grand Old Men –

Although they've very often told us that they try to do  
their best,  
Are they up to the Full Fruit Standard, would they pass  
the Spelling Test?

– Because we've got our eyes to keyholes, we know  
everything they've done,  
Lecturing on minor poets 'Literature is quite good fun '

And if you should try to fool us, imitate them, do the  
same,  
We'll refuse your dummy bullets, we've had time to take  
our aim

We've been drinking stagnant water for some twenty  
years or more  
While the politicians slowly planned a bigger reservoir.

But we've dammed a different river, the water-wheel is  
going again.

Now we've stopped designing sweaters and we've  
started in to train.

We've given up the Georgian poets, teaching dance  
bands how to croon,  
Bicycling in coloured goggles underneath a pallid moon.

We've destroyed the rotting signposts, made holes in all  
the pleasure boats;  
We'll pull down ancestral castles when we've time to  
swim the moats.

When we've practised we shall beat you with our Third  
or Fourth Fifteen,  
In spite of Royalists on the touchline. 'Oh, well played,  
Sir!' 'Keep it clean!'

Our backs are fast as motor-cycles, all our forwards  
twenty-stone.  
Each of them can score unaided, running strongly on his  
own.

Every minute scouts give signals, come reporting what  
they've seen.  
'Captain Ferguson is putting.' 'Undermine the  
eighteenth green.'

Before next month we'll storm the clubhouse. Messages  
are coming through:  
'Darwin, doing crossword puzzles, tries to find the  
missing clue.'

The *Times* Third Leaders are decoded, pigeon-holed for  
future use;  
Tennyson has been convicted of incessant self-abuse.

We've been sending notes to Priestley, orange pips to  
J. C Squire -  
'Don't defend the trench you're holding ' 'Now the fat is  
in the fire '

We've got control of all the railways and the perfume  
factories,  
We're supercharged and have connection with the  
strongest batteries

So if you feel like playing truant, remember that the  
game is up  
Or you'll find that quite politely you've been sold a nasty  
pup

## VI

### *Public School*

A surname in this place  
Is fitting Keeps reserved  
Emotional platoons  
Positioned in the eyes,  
Attentive for a word

The pupils here obey  
The friend's didactic voice,  
Are wakeful at a smile,  
Can answer questions, lie,  
Express polite surprise

If one should raise a hand,  
Ask question out of turn,  
Then discipline would die,  
Order be broken and  
The other's eye be stern.

## VII

### *On the Author's Photograph*

Yes, apprehensive eye,  
We know, averted head.  
I remember what I  
Have done, have said.

Sleek head, you seal,  
Shy pupil, still at school,  
I know the pain you feel,  
The pain of the fool.

## VIII

### *The Fourth of May\**

My dear old school goes back to-day,  
Fumbling for tips and 'Goodbye, old boy,'  
Shall we give it a cheer?  
Let us pray for its members, past and present,  
Let us remember how unpleasant  
Most of them were.

To-morrow there'll be the same old rags,  
The disgusted prefects going with fags,  
The long walks in the woods,  
The despondent scribbling in worn-out rears,  
The long discussions in comfy chairs  
On eternal goods.

\*This poem, written in the summer of 1934, was published later that year in Esmond Romilly's anti-Public School magazine *Out of Bounds*. As a result, Mr Mahim sent me a letter saying that it would not be a good thing for me to visit the school for at least three years.

Remember how, in capitals, WOMAN  
Was thought of as tart or as superhuman,  
Remember the vague  
Nimbus of undefined emotion  
Round the words 'Country,' 'Duty,' 'Devotion,'  
Poppies, Earl Haig

They took me to see the working class,  
I stood there feeling unwanted, an ass,  
By the London docks  
If they haven't the reputation of sinners  
Toc H gives people occasional dinners,  
As sly as a fox

But most of us never saw the slums,  
The marching we knew was done to drums  
And in uniform .  
Remember how sex was a festering sore,  
How they plastered it over more and more  
As a 'matter of form'

Interception of notes became a game,  
Their only amusement, the penalty Shame  
They knew their cues  
'Sex is God's and you mustn't touch it,  
It's a beautiful shoe whose very latchet  
You may not loose '

So we were onanists; beds at night  
Used to respond with continual slight  
Creaks of their springs  
But this was love's face in a mirror  
That showed fatigue, not joy or terror,  
Eyes hollow rings

Remember the countless Latin proses,  
The poems we read, about girls and roses,  
Ethereal feelings,  
Lofting shots from the sensual bunker,  
Buds untouched by a worldly canker,  
Sublime as ceilings



Remember, we prayed like anything  
For Peace and the Forces of the King,  
Land, sea and air,  
While sexual activity became  
Hockey or Rugger, any game,  
To tough and tear.

A host of rules; but it was these,  
The attitudes of the authorities,  
That made us bitter;  
And now we realise that we,  
Try as we may, can never be  
A boundary hitter.

Emotionally we're almost dead,  
To have stunned us, hit us on the head,  
Would have been better;  
Our white-hot desires were twisted  
Inwards by their frightful, boasted  
'Obedience to the letter.'

What should be love in us is hate,  
Habits of feeling continued late  
Are with us still.  
We keep alive on a series of kicks,  
Occasional women and Hollywood flicks.  
We feel rather ill.

The outside world for us was a fable,  
A topic that sat at the breakfast table,  
Renowned for sin.  
We were trained up a different wall  
And the result is that after all  
We don't fit in.

My dear old school goes back to-day;  
I shouldn't cheer it, shout 'Hooray!'  
Because you know too well  
That those who smile because it's new  
Will find out in a year or two  
What parsons mean by Hell.

## IX

Though what I think is hardly news  
Thoughts in my mind like boat-race crews  
Catch, overtake each other;  
Here, clothed and warm, my mental sorrow  
Turns to the child to be born to-morrow,  
To whom it will be mother,

Passive, without the body's action,  
'Go down with your world' is my reflection  
And some of our opponents  
Are neither lunatics nor wicked,  
The simple question, Is this cricket?  
Rekurs again at moments

These doubts are sharp as arrow-heads,  
Poisoned, cause fevers, crumpled beds,  
But stop Who made them first?  
Not Lohengrin nor Havelock Ellis  
But little men with heavy bellies,  
The wisest and the worst

These talkers, writers, after all,  
Gilding the pill or the cannon-ball,  
Were made in factories  
Sweat and boredom, hunger, dirt  
Gave her her figure, her wavering skirt,  
Her scintillating eyes

His books were written by feeble hands,  
His brain cells and his sexy glands  
Formed by hermaphrodites,  
Though noise of miners underground,  
Would be an unfamiliar sound,  
Spoiling his summer nights

The little men who own it all  
Sit in their offices, tidy, small,  
And on their registers  
Are men who sloosh themselves with water,  
Sexing about with the major's daughter,  
Young women in their furs.

What can we do? The walls all round  
Go four feet deep into the ground.  
But still, we have our pens;  
Let this, by writing, be our purpose:  
Distract the naturalist from his porpoise,  
The farmer from his hens,

To bring to those in mental attics  
More than the facts of hydrostatics,  
A creed, a living thing.  
For now the gods have left the hollows,  
Snow-white Venuses and Apollos,  
To crown another king.

Christ was decent; but his priests,  
Resembling birds rather than beasts,  
Aren't useful any more.  
The city is besieged; on boats  
We send our hastily scribbled notes  
Up to the warehouse door

To be deciphered by our kind,  
The men who live in the tortured mind,  
To show them their condition,  
To ask their help, to make them see  
That these things, said again by me,  
Are worth the repetition.

# X

## *Song*

For the island that's not on the chart,  
For the whistle that isn't a bird,  
The sly beckoning-on of the heart  
To admit that all action's absurd,  
For the rationalization of fear,  
For the man who's turned in and not out,  
For the sudden refusal to cheer,  
All patrols look out!

For the writer believing in style,  
For the liberal wanting a pat,  
For the humorous people who smile,  
For the woman who looks like a cat,  
For the mortification of mind,  
For the inward betrayal, the doubt  
Feeding on all it can find,  
All patrols look out!

For the bounder who isn't a cad,  
For the person who plays with ideas,  
The obsession that isn't a fad  
But a fault that's continued for years,  
For the lust that keeps trying to be love,  
For the tickling that isn't for trout,  
For the will-forced emotional bluff,  
All patrols look out!

For the virgin, malicious and ill,  
For the schoolmaster loving exams,  
For imperialists eager to kill,  
Kidnapping children in prams,  
For the press-gangs, the men who are sold,  
Smart girls who go proudly about,  
Dreaming of youth but are old,  
All patrols look out!

For the single, spontaneous cry  
Of the man who has seen his mistakes,  
For the collapsible boat of the spy,  
Patrolling the glacier lakes,  
For the tortures unseen in a house,  
For the note in the hand of the tout,  
For the scuffle that isn't a mouse,  
All patrols look out!

Scatter the pamphlets we gave,  
Keep secretly spreading the Word,  
There are some you could easily save,  
Converted if only they'd heard.  
Be alert for the beat of the gong,  
Conquer the scowl and the pout,  
These things are important and right, not wrong,  
So all patrols look out!

## XI

My friend is far, his assurance and despondency,  
His singing and his smallness far from me,  
Not to be heard or seen. The lack I feel,  
Empty and monotonous, the drowned ocean bell,

Rings through my head, who sit and think.  
His thoughtless touch, his ordering a drink  
Occur to me, his gestures in the sun,  
As I sit here alone in a strange town.

## XII

He thought of being in a single room,  
Working in shirt sleeves at a public school  
Feeling unhappy and desiring change,  
How he was on the nerves of all his friends  
Fretting in solitude all that summer

He knew that he had passed another summer,  
Looked through the window of his single room  
But least of all had he accomplished change  
Although affectionate to different friends,  
With memories fading of his public school

He wondered vaguely, Was the world a school?  
Running by rules and quite opposed to change,  
Censoring love though not averse to friends,  
From which were only holidays in summer,  
Packing a trunk and stepping from a room?

Must he from fears and illness keep his room,  
Afraid of words like 'intimacy' and 'friends',  
Life seen from windows, there be never change?  
His university was only school  
Hardly made bearable by friends and summer

The time for opening windows was in summer,  
In love perhaps and not at ease with friends,  
Feeling their presence discipline like school  
But he alone could never leave that room  
Although disturbing winds whispered of change

Some words haunted his brain, like 'love' and 'change',  
Took on new significance in the summer  
Some words turned into phrases, 'O my room,'  
'Open the windows', and this was his school  
Teaching him grammar and the worth of friends

## XIII

To go, to leave the classics and the buildings,  
So tall and false and intricate with spires,  
To run in joy from the imagined wood,  
As children who have never heard of good,  
To feed the flames of the forgotten fires.

This is my wish but my wish cannot be.  
At times I should be dead like skull or stone  
Or living with the slow life of a tree  
Or half-asleep as one would think the sea  
Or anything content to be alone.

Not living like this, ticking of a clock,  
Afraid of friends and cataloguing wants,  
Knowing so little, wanting far too much –  
What else is tenderness but touch?  
And what so far from me, though nearer once?

## XIV

### *Poem before Sleep*

I concentrate on the moon, so cold, so far,  
Conscious of all my veins, that own me king,  
Even the subcutaneous inguinal ring,  
All quiet as the moon or any star,  
Remembering the song they have to sing.

Beauty is hair, hair animal and fluffy,  
But could not stir me from my single bed  
My darling is the moon and in my head  
I forget girls as schoolboys forget toffee,  
Everything that I did and that she said

The moon is lovely, our perpetual critic,  
And would not hate or pity, would not try,  
Acceptance of the earth and of the sky  
Has made her saintly, beautiful ascetic,  
Until men fear that calm, unbiassed eye

## XV

We see in parks the children of the rich  
Alive in colour, tractor on a hill,  
By sudden moments our soul is made rich  
Like child or hill

So we are moved, by girl's eye or a boy's,  
Quick passing figures, slow ship on the sea  
Sex has torpedoes and content its buoys  
In us as sea,

Who dramatize the young man's stormy passage,  
A point of honour to assure the self,  
Make suffering duty, underline the passage,  
Sad with our self



## XVI

We who were together shall now be apart,  
Nosing our way between icebergs in this immense glacial  
world,  
Different courses sailing, stamping our feet  
From cold or from impatience, but with the  
remembrance of warmth  
Somewhere within us and somehow remembered,  
Even in this iciness never quite extinguished.  
And at the mast-top the eager watcher,  
Ready to shout 'Land!', draws freezing breath.

## XVII

### *Sentimental Blues*

Now triumph is in deserts  
And occasional victory  
For the nervous is power and glory,  
Religious words to peasants,  
While often the lucid rain  
Falls into willing earth,  
The evening a flower closing,  
Remission of pain.

Swimmers in seas of gloom,  
Sinking the dim fathoms,  
Green and brown caverns  
In the furniture of a room,

Never express what we mean,  
Miserable and helpless,  
Laughing and sentimental,  
Describe such twilight scene.

We rescue shipwrecked words  
From our seas of despair,  
Terror is in the air  
And the inexplicable birds,  
Life on the edge of death,  
Sleeping on the margin,  
Eating, sleeping and talking,  
Talking is waste of breath

## XVIII

### *Song*

The famous fascist, night,  
With the black taking power,  
Suppresses all our light  
And only our desire  
Puts two and two together,  
Survives the coup d'état

Once the great writer said  
A logic of the blood,  
Like reading books in bed,  
That will restore the good,  
Each waiting for the other  
Remembers the words read

But only in the brain  
Is that conversion valid  
And the limbs grow insane  
For the touch of something solid,  
For the uninhibited lover  
And sexual peace again.

## XIX

### *Dollfuss Day, 1935*

The young heads that I find attractive  
Turn towards a political sermon  
That promises and does not give,  
Like postcard of a mountain village  
That vouches for the truth of beauty  
It can at best allege.

The priest assures the Chancellor's smiling  
Moored to the land, balloon being Heaven.  
The negligent, glancing girl who might be willing  
Stares at the strangers, details of their clothing,  
And inattentive to death's propaganda  
Remembers loving.

But costumed boys who have not heard of love  
Believe the story of a brutal death,  
The priest with clasping hands, the Face above,  
Less distant than the town across the sea,  
While in the dark the Chancellor's photo  
Gleams like a Christmas tree.

## XX

### *The Old Ladies*

The indignation that nobody hears  
Keeps the old ladies calm, though it distresses,  
Often descending the broad, shallow stairs  
In various handsome dresses  
The hope of one is for a husband's death,  
Another lives expecting her son's letters,  
The favourite play of many is *Macbeth*,  
And some have dreamed of fetters

What they have been and what they still might be  
Appear as fantasies or an obsession  
A husband becomes man walking as a tree,  
Miraculous self-possession  
And finally commanding aspect cries  
To die in unconditional obedience,  
Weakness prays for power dropped from the skies,  
Rejecting the old expedients

To rule or to obey, the feudal dreams,  
Defeat their ends, becoming opposite,  
For each is more a habit than it seems  
And both inapposite,  
Sympathy and affection then are rumour  
And energy frozen to a glacier,  
A dancing-floor for others' black-masked Humour  
With his conventional rapier

## XXI

### *Salzburg Festival City*

The fairyland fortress, grey stone growing from rock,  
Stands for my will, upon unconscious self  
More ordered, smaller, but not independent,  
Stone upon stone, that pine trees complicate,  
Springing more pure from the thick soil of dreams.

All birds are twittering questions, why I like  
One girl, dislike another; answers lie  
Like unkissed beauties in that sleeping forest  
Or else like struggling fish from this swift stream  
Hooked they lie breathless, patient angler's pride.

This town of self has now gay visitors,  
Thoughts wearing feathered hats, attractive walkers,  
Strange to the ordinary dull inhabitants,  
Brooding on money loss, failure and fear;  
The bridge has flags of hope waving in sun.

## XXII

### *Song*

Acts of anger, not acts of love,  
Keep me alive for the promised dove  
And the daily expected tongues of fire,  
Everything that I most admire,  
The forward girl and the willingness  
Stepping gaily from a summer dress.

Often drinking a cup of tea,  
I think of what love means to me,  
How never the glances or the kiss  
Were ever anything like this,  
The magic compound in the crucible,  
And the poor spirit's miracle

If my eyes were further apart  
I'd call somebody 'sweetheart',  
But in the leafy winter gales  
It seems that my attraction fails  
And never ended, never begun  
Are my advances to everyone

## XXIII

### *Election Song, 1935*

The black-tipped fox is creeping up the valley,  
Winter like a steel trap closing in,  
Whose winds are singing won't you come and help us,  
Which side do you want to win?

Winter is cold and clothes are scanty,  
Food is a rare visitor to the lip  
The working class all over the country  
Must watch its step

It's a matter that concerns the old ones  
And the young who kiss and cuddle,  
The shy ones and the bold ones,  
It's the class-struggle

War you say now, meaning Abyssinia,  
We won't have anything to do with war,  
But before you know it he'll be seein' you,  
You'll hear him knocking at the door.

Bombing aeroplanes carry the simple message  
To France and Russia and across the Channel  
It's written in mustard-gas: 'Block Mussolini's passage,  
Close the Suez Canal!'

Always the rich cars come and go,  
The famous duchesses are slumming,  
Bitter and beautiful falls the snow,  
The crisp snow coming,

Bearing no comfort to the buried lives.  
'Ugly,' they say and 'Such an uncouth accent!'  
'Many of them beat their wives  
And they're not pure Anglo-Saxon.'

The ships are waiting for the tide  
With the usual lights at port and starboard,  
Over the football fields airliners glide  
And the handsome centre forward.

Ships are involved, bus, tram and tube,  
Societies of anti-vivisection,  
Even the Methodist Tennis Club.  
It's a general election.

If you enjoy the running blood,  
The boring trenches and the flashing sabre,  
The young man trampled in the mud,  
Then don't vote Labour.

Or if you prefer the harpsichord  
The folk-dancing and the tabor  
Or shut your eyes and trust in the Lord  
Don't vote Labour.

We shall preserve the ancient sweetness,  
And books published by Faber,  
But our class-culture lacks completeness,  
So vote Labour

It's food we mean and self-respect,  
Not heroism in Arabia,  
And it's up to you and whom you elect,  
So vote Labour

## XXIV

The smells of autumn and its solemn brown,  
Thoughts that are lit like careless cigarettes  
Illumining the figures at the gate,  
Are memory of what I've seen and done  
Vanish in smoke, what I have seen and done

Particularly wood beside a river,  
In a stone building, boredom, father's anger;  
Marching somewhere, marching and a banner  
These images recur, but not for ever  
I exiate by memory and for ever

Malice I remember, to a friend,  
Excitement playing games, the early teacher,  
Suddenly clear the accent and the feature,  
Beginning anxious and the happy end  
So burn these scraps in fire and make an end



# XXV

## *Political Poem*

O communists with gradual inevitable chemical action  
Turning this blue litmus people red,  
As potent as acid, the good, we believe you have got it.  
We believe that you are our enormous nurse  
Helping us not to cry in the dark, not to steal sweets,  
Kindly to many, a saviour of rearrangement.  
We must believe in you as we believe in life.  
Our faith flies over the world like an unassuming bird,  
Peacock not nor nightingale but brown and confident,  
No song having but the experimental magic call  
Emotive as factory sirens, a caller to freedom.

Our contests held in the round amphitheatre of the skull  
Mirror your fighting; pain and ideas of pain,  
Fear and ideas of fear alike are enemies.  
Our indolent mystical helping is done in the name of the  
summer,  
In the name of landscapes, in an atmosphere of dancing,  
Sensitive to you as the powerful throb of accordions,  
We accept our world as your world upside down.

## XXVI

We follow lives that twist like woodland paths,  
Each having many lives, those in the sun,  
External, are the best The life that sees  
Landscapes as beautiful and limbs in clothes  
Crying for delivery, the anxious sexual children  
Confined in warmth and tired of their peace  
Also the life that throbs with music's rhythms,  
A Nordic boy with an accordion

He is a good one Also good the life  
Content to listen, patient, the poised hawk  
In powerful withdrawal above the dovelike words,  
Stronger by mercy, the active intellect

The lives are bad that conscious of impressions  
Push tentative roots, feel for depths, can talk  
Only to mirrors, mirrors all for them  
Impress an image, theirs, on face and note,  
Four words impressing, 'How do we react?'  
Their paths are circular within the wood

## XXVII

### *The English Wife*

He had a steady hand  
And a clear eye,  
He was gay, he was bland,  
And as straight as a die

I was never frigid,  
I was never coy,  
But O he has left me  
For a pretty boy,

For a gay mechanic  
Unbuttoning overalls,  
More dangerous than movies  
Or the music halls.

Once he longed for me  
And my lovely bed  
And in these hands have rested  
His tired head.

And the soft exertions  
Of the velvet night  
Were the bold assertions  
Of my ancient right,

The language of the body,  
The sincere saying,  
No winner in the game  
That we were playing.

I was significant form  
And the fabled city,  
Who now am torn  
With anger and self-pity.

I was the Ideal  
And abstract beauty,  
More powerful than power  
Or sense of duty.

By accident I saw them  
In the little car,  
Urged with love's secrecy  
Behind the garage door.

The wind, how it did blow!  
And the rain drumming  
Delayed the bitter snow,  
The crisp snow coming

I sheltered in the doorway  
But my heart was in the storm,  
While in the azure coupé  
They were warm, so warm!

With their kissing and their fingers,  
In love's aerodrome,  
At the controls I left them  
And walked home

For hours I sat in silence  
With my numbness and my pain,  
But his car was stumbling westwards  
Through the bounding rain

He drove my happiness away  
Into red Devon,  
He took the brightest angels  
Out of my heaven,

Down the motorist's roads  
To the teashops and the cream  
He left me sad and single  
With a sexual dream,

An unreal incubus  
And a real sorrow  
Not for to-day only  
But for to-morrow

And in the dim city  
And the aching vein  
The true reality is pity  
And the pain, the pain

# XVIII

## *Song*

The waves of tenderness beat still  
On a shore of solitude,  
Behind the sail the wind is ill  
And melancholy the mood,  
Haunted the motive and the will  
Confused for what is good,

And passers-by are passers-by,  
Shop-windows are for show,  
No signposts on those roads that I  
Have never dared to go,  
The passionate question in the eye  
Unanswered long ago.

A childhood image on that screen  
Perturbs the charming face,  
A city on the rustic scene  
Has put me into a daze,  
Only the thought of what I have been  
In such another place.

## XXIX

### *Jazz Song*

Life is short and time is money  
And 'Push' is written on the door to success,  
So come to me now, I feel so funny,  
Down the road of wisdom and the path of excess!

Nobody knows where we'll be to-morrow,  
The future's likely to be a mess,  
We can't keep things but we can borrow,  
So always try to answer 'yes'

Even censors are only human  
And their daughters dance in suggestive dress,  
So learn to Rumba and be Cuban  
And I'll teach you things you'd never guess!

## XXX

O girl beneath the exploring hand  
Silently quivering,  
Enter with me that monotonous land  
Where the eyes are sovereign,  
Forget what you say and what you see,  
Your twenty years of living and me  
And the sun and the rain

Everything but that particular spot  
Where the eye is a mirror,  
The palm trees and the desert so hot  
And the midnight terror.  
Forget it, baby, it's all a dream,  
What it may be or what it may seem,  
All those people together.

Only the eyes can shine through all,  
The country houses,  
The family jokes and the May Week Ball,  
The transparent blouses,  
The pointed look and the printed page,  
The disturbances of this day and age,  
That amazes, amuses.

Take my affection, you know it's yours,  
And the hugs and the kisses,  
Curtain the windows and shut the doors,  
Whatever life misses  
Here it is in our arms, my dear,  
Heaven on earth, yes, our heaven is here  
And in no other places.

## XXXI

### *Summer Time Ends Today*

My nervous energy spent  
And summer in retreat  
I think my autumn thoughts  
As I walk down the autumn street.

Equable and sad  
With a delicate melancholy  
I trace the lips and the eyelids and  
The beautiful supple body

The curls on her neck and the kisses  
Warm and moist and tender,  
Part of my mind now, only mental  
That perfect surrender

All changed and the leaves are falling  
As the year moves to its end  
And she who was my lover  
Is only my friend

## XXXII

### *Cambridge*

Imagine all the dons in the attitudes of buggers  
With their complicated neurotic simplicity of learning,  
Something comfortable, something not quite real,  
The life of the tea-table, the book-scattered study,  
The manuscript under the magnifying glass  
In that white, cultured hand, deserving of pity

Dons live on with occasional satisfaction,  
Hand on the shoulder of the promising pupil,  
Attracted but envious of the coming young men,  
Middle age has caught them and the night comes after,  
No soothing books and no charming companions  
To quieten those nerves that cry for satisfaction



What was their desire? Was it known and never realized,  
Behind the lines and bathed in yellow lamplight?  
In the world where their young men fight and are  
    wounded  
They suffer neglect like a curtain or a picture.  
Pitying themselves they are never wounded,  
Suffering quietly with a book in hand or smoking.

## XXXIII

### *Verse from an Opera –* *The Village Dragon*\*

#### *1 Prologue*

This is a story of dragons and in putting a dragon before  
    you  
We don't want to bore you.  
Directors of banks and you who work in a bursary  
Remember your nursery  
When toys were real and wallpapers told stories  
Of simple glories,  
The gallant knight and the lovely lady,  
But also the shady  
Villainous dragon with the arrow-tail  
Drinking from the sea or your seaside pail.

\* *The Village Dragon* was written as the libretto for a jazz opera (heavily in debt to Auden and Isherwood's *The Dog Beneath The Skin*). One or two numbers were actually written by Frank Scholl, a contemporary of mine at Cambridge, but it never got farther than that.

People, think backwards, suspend your disbelief!  
Like an autumn leaf  
Dragons lie hid to-day in the secret foliage,  
Beyond your knowledge  
All forest fires and motor accidents  
Are their experiments,  
The couple snapped up in the bluebell wood  
Would tell if they could,  
The cigarette-ends and the girl's dress found in the gorse  
Mark a dragon's course  
Yes, they are clever, with their crimson tongues  
And their powerful lungs  
They are very seldom seen  
In that protective colouring, being green

A girl called H is the lady fair  
With carmine lips and golden hair  
The dragon's name is Old Sir Percy  
Who disregards appeals for mercy,  
The hero's Christian name is Giles,  
A traveller over many miles,  
Liberating from ghost and flood  
The happy common and sinister wood  
Ring up the curtain on our captain actor,  
The neighbourhood's future benefactor!

## *2 Love Duet*

*Giles*

A thought of hills to one walking on pavement,  
The captive's dream of the end of his enslavement,  
An escape from prison  
Like these is our vision

*H*

Night and the light and the promise of the city  
Offer us prizes of tenderness and pity,  
The death of the dragon  
And a sleeping waggon

*Giles:*

Flying away to an unvisited country  
Where caresses shall lack the accustomed sentry,  
Joy be unconcealed  
And love revealed.

*H:*

Where no dragon's tail shall whisk at a corner,  
Vanishing suddenly like a literature-scorner,  
And the breath of fire  
Shall forget its desire.

*Giles:*

After the sea-fight the promised landing  
With increased pleasure and understanding,  
No flag at half-mast  
And the past past.

*H:*

What has been weak and what has been rotten  
From then onwards shall be quite forgotten,  
The lesson learnt  
And the letter burnt.

*Giles:*

After this singular public service  
We shall never despair and never be nervous  
But be safe on deck  
With no thought of a wreck.

*Both:*

Constantly happy, not depressed or elated,  
We shall be perfectly integrated,  
Living as lovers  
On what love discovers.

### 3 *Sir Percy's Song*

O vice is nice  
And virtue won't hurt you  
In the amoral world,  
Whatever you do  
So long as it's new  
And even if it's old

Supposing it's funny,  
Supposing it's money,  
But always if it flatters,  
If it makes you happy  
Then make it snappy,  
There's nothing else that matters

If it's boys or girls  
If it's ropes of pearls,  
If it's motor cars or gin,  
You'll soon be dead  
So go ahead,  
Don't hesitate, begin!

If it's an heirloom  
Or a slim volume,  
A virgin or a widow,  
If it's the flesh  
Or a champion fish  
Or the cottage in the meadow

If it's night-starvation  
Or saving the nation  
Or an unexpected cheque,  
It's the same to us,  
We don't make a fuss,  
What you have or what you take

Is it Mrs Besant\*  
Or shooting a pheasant  
Or the Rosenkavalier,  
Is it social conditions  
And East End missions  
Or the Ritz and caviare?

Is it Ezra Pound  
Or Dorothy Round†  
Or ecclesiastical calm  
And reading *The Times*  
Or pantomimes  
Or a cricket bat under your arm?

Is it Budapest  
Or an eagle's nest  
Or a week in gay Paree,  
Is it Chaliapine  
Or the Golden Mean  
Or the moonlight on the sea?

Is it loaded dice  
Or a strawberry ice  
Or a prep school on the Downs,  
Is it Beverley Nichols  
Or hammers and sickles  
Or Mrs Belloc Lowndes?‡

Is it reading Homer  
Or William Plomer  
Or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch,  
An Old School dinner,  
A Derby winner  
Or practising the Mooche?

\* A spiritualist

† A well-known British tennis-player.

‡ A travelist

Is it saving your soul  
Or birth-control  
Or scoring the winning try?  
Is it budding genius  
Or pet gardenias  
Or the beautiful evening sky?

Is it Maurice's\* hat  
Or a furnished flat  
That makes your pulses beat?  
Is your paradise  
In Garbo's eyes  
Or Ginger Rogers' feet?

Is it Colman's smile  
That makes life worth while  
Or Crawford's significant form?  
Is it Lombard's lips  
Or Mac West's hips  
That carry you through the storm?

Whatever you choose,  
And it might be news,  
Whatever you wish or dream,  
If it's far or near  
You can have it here  
For we're nicer than we seem

O vice is nice  
And virtue won't hurt you  
In the amoral world!  
Whatever you do  
So long as it's new  
And even if it's old!

\* Maurice Chevalier

#### 4 Song by Giles

Giles:

The body is a reservoir of strength,  
Intellect above and love below.  
Some say the intellect is love  
And only loves what it can know.

'Below there is not, but Above,  
And that is where those waters flow,  
Darkened and arrogant with pride.'  
But they are wrong who say it so.

Chorus:

Can love sustain  
Summer lightning and winter rain?

Giles:

Honesty once was a signal virtue  
And only used one-syllable words  
But it is love that is now the scarecrow  
And the intellect sends its curious birds

To peer at this single ragged survivor,  
Rooted in the rich, heavy fields,  
Of soft and warm and moist and tender,  
That conquers chiefly when it yields.

Chorus:

O, beware of sex  
With its thousand necks!

#### 5 Chorus of Villagers\*

There are timber logs  
And musical chairs  
And fucking dogs  
In the genteel squares

\* I have restored the adjective 'fucking' In 1939, when *Poems and Songs* was published, such words could not be printed. Similar blanks have been filled in in the poem 'Fed Up and Going Down'.

Where comfort lives,  
But in Tonytown  
Nobody gives  
And the leaves are down.

A depressing sight  
For the chap-lipped poor,  
And the saviour knight  
Passes by the door

When the lights are low  
And the town is far  
How should we know  
Of that Eastern star

Leading us on  
To the sacred hay,  
To the mystic One  
And the lovely day?

Why should we care  
For that bitter death  
And the songs in the air  
And the ancient myth?

Doors are locked  
And fires are out  
But we are mocked  
By the Great Without

We have no pride  
Who have no doubt  
That there outside  
Dragons move about

In the hostile night  
Windows can slide  
And the horrible sight  
Makes us open-eyed



The hand on the plough  
And the hand on the spade  
Both know how  
But are both afraid

In the complex act  
Without a friend  
But the friendly fact  
Death is the end,

The final villager  
Equal and free  
With the highborn pillager  
For eternity.

## *6 Question and Answer*

### *Question:*

Is it the hostile grouping of two hockey teams  
That the gaiety of parties hides us from,  
Behind the curtain what is it it seems  
That keeps us sullen and nervously at home?

### *Answer:*

In the country and in the town  
It is the future that is getting us down.

### *Question.*

Tell us about this sinister insistence  
On our aphasia and our shrinking eye,  
Never remitting and clouding our existence,  
Tell us if it shall happen bye and bye.

### *Answer:*

The shadow on the floor  
Is the longest shadow, cast by war.

*Question*

Can any feminine influence soothe us,  
The hand on the arm or the tongue in the kiss,  
Can these redeem before death shall remove us  
Or is there no way out of this?

*Answer*

The girl shall read but not understand  
The poems of the loving hand.

But there are ways if you would take them,  
Subtle and dangerous, hard and crude,  
Of politics and education,  
To overtake what you and time pursued

*Question*

There was a door  
But you have been the key, not known before

*7 Night-time Chorus*

The hard shapes of the day-time and the light  
Are washed by waves of darkness and the all-pervading  
    night  
And gradually the young are learning how to live,  
Learning what to take and what to give,

Finding their feet, to gradually recover  
From that wicked century's hangover,  
From art as art and work as work  
Where the sensational spectres lurk

Making full use of their talents  
They begin to achieve the long lost sense of balance  
Returning step by step from the twilight lands,  
Eagerly caressed by pink and trembling hands

Happiness has an unfamiliar feel  
To those unused to the even keel,  
Familiar with birds and dreams and mornings  
Dazed with the thunder and the storm-warnings

But now no hesitation in the motor-bus wheels,  
In their huge rubber circles, shows what pride conceals  
And we can sail in an ocean however deep  
Who go now to a sound and healthy sleep

With no thought of the beautiful, persecuted head  
Or simple martyrs since forgotten and dead.  
In our ignorance we put questions but Giles was the  
answer;  
He played the music but Reality was the dancer.

### *8 Wistful Song*

In the eighteenth century gay young men  
Had all the housemaids to practise on  
But nowadays the bourgeoisie  
Seem to be meaner and not so free.

And always the footstep on the stair  
Keeps the loving hands from the lovely hair;  
While things are safer but not so pleasant  
For the beautiful town-attracted peasant.

It's the class-struggle in a final stage  
That makes the intellectuals rage,  
Beating their heads against the doors,  
Like ships cast off from the friendly shores,

So far away from the harbour bar  
And not quite certain where they are,  
Some of the flags are flying half-mast  
And what they long for is the Past.

And sorrow, once proud and elemental,  
Only makes them more sentimental,  
Turning from quarrels with the Mater  
To tender readings of Walter Pater.

Hopeful voices are hard to hear  
In that oppressive atmosphere  
And no plain speaking and well-planned marriage  
Are like being sick in a first-class carriage.

Until the mistress or the wife  
Their sorrow seems as large as life  
And sympathy's all that we can do  
When they're feeling randy or feeling blue

*9 Chorus Leader*

Pity the individual  
For ever divided,  
Breaking down and  
Cracking up  
The world at his feet  
And he undecided

Pity the young ones,  
Their sexy dreaming,  
Moody, uncertain,  
Expecting only  
A doubtful future with its masked scheming

Pity the old ones,  
Going gay or silly,  
Cynical, sensual,  
Oh, what  
Of the night when the evening grows chilly?

Mechanical world,  
Embraced by lovers,  
Turner untroubled,  
Tell us  
What each one living has done or suffers!

## XXXIV

### *Miss Twye*

Miss Twye was soaping her breasts in her bath  
When she heard behind her a meaning laugh  
And to her amazement she discovered  
A wicked man in the bathroom cupboard.

## XXXV

### *Fed Up and Going Down*

Goodbye to all the fucking English Tripos,  
Goodbye to fucking silly girls in Girton,  
Goodbye to all the scurfy, doddering dons,  
And let the virgin Newnham keep its skirt on.

Goodbye to young neurotics in their beds,  
Sleeplessly planning how to save the Nation,  
Goodbye to all the bureaucratic reds,  
Goodbye to cocoa and emancipation.

Goodbye to spectacles and to straight hair,  
Goodbye to all the mannered pathics,  
Goodbye to Boat Clubs drowned in seas of beer  
And spotty scholars reading Clathics.

Goodbye to all the flowers of culture,  
Goodbye to all the local whoredom,  
Goodbye to lectures early in the morning,  
Goodbye to flicks and blinds and boredom.

Goodbye to river parties in canoes  
And miserable, frustrated dances,  
Goodbye to all the bread-throwing Blues,  
Goodbye to the depressed romances.



Do as you please, for time runs on to London,  
Where girls will finger you and life be different,  
Cambridge forget you like the Isle of Thanet\*  
Or the black rock the single cormorant.

## XXXVII

From mass of enemies, group of friends  
Or in indifferent world the young man lives,  
Ambition turning to the higher buildings,  
Tracing the dream in architectural mouldings,  
Among giant flats arranged like hives.

What unsuccessful love, what hidden whisper,  
What doubted talent on the hidden shore,  
Prompt him to make a doubtful future certain,  
Spy on the scuffling heard behind a curtain,  
The childhood voices crying for more and more?

Simply to compete, establish value,  
Say to the self You are not weak or small,  
This turns him to the earnest conversations  
Where to impress is wartime decorations  
And failure to be shot against a wall.

Like magazines, like sipping drinks and smoking,  
This life is useless and the words a strain,  
So much to bother, so much to be haunted,  
No morning take its afternoon for granted,  
These are his days till life runs smooth again.

\* My preparatory school was in the Isle of Thanet

## XXXVIII

### *Days of Contempt*

Bring me light verse to liquidate my sorrow  
And make it really light – not dull or shoddy!  
My life may be much happier to-morrow,  
Hunger and love that press against the body,  
The two eternal needs we recognize –  
Desires that so relentlessly pursue one –  
May get me down or raise me to the skies  
And make me a Don Bradman or Don Juan

Freud said that writers always compensate  
By fantasies of power and love of women  
The inadequacies of their lonely state,  
Till dreams come true and then they rank as he-men  
I think that Freud was wrong and ought to know it  
I always find it wiser not to let on  
For somehow girls avoid the simple poet –  
Verse isn't stuff it's really safe to bet on

I may be happier, as I said before,  
But at the moment I am unemployed,  
Love unrequited makes my life a bore  
(To complete Oscar's jest – 'I'm unenjoyed')  
And skies are dark but don't rain love or money  
As I sit eating ginger nuts and smoking  
Somehow I don't think life is very funny –  
More cause for a complaint than jolly joking

But still, I won't turn nasty like Laforgue,  
Who renounced Lerve – or odd like Baudelaire,  
Or stretched out on a table in a morgue  
Lie still in mute reproach – I like free air,  
I like the girls and strawberries and cream  
And I like Groucho more than I can say –  
Life isn't just exactly love's young dream  
But somehow I get by from day to day



I'm fond of parties and I'm fond of wit,  
I simply love the Eighteenth-Century Novel,  
I think Shakespeare was great, yes, every bit –  
Before such genius I'm prepared to grovel.  
I'm keen on modern poets – Yeats of course  
And Auden's variegated splendour,  
I think MacNeice is rather a dark horse,  
There's something very Nordic about Spender.

Life has its pleasures, few and far between;  
But there's a danger, that is, as I see it;  
Poets try hard to tell you what they mean  
But mostly tend to analyse, not be it.  
And life split into watertight compartments  
Isn't quite what life once used to be.  
To meditate in bachelor apartments  
Has somehow never been my cup of tea.

Yes, in the Spring a young man's thoughts grow  
warmer –  
Or used to once. But now he seems to falter  
And wonders if it's an erotic trauma.  
A double bed might lead him to the altar  
But short of that there's nothing that's much good.  
Some know the words and practise on their friends,  
That only lands them further in the wood –  
Amateur psychologists can wreck week-ends.

The reasons are so clear just why I'm fed up –  
Perhaps old Father Time will take a hand  
And help me when I'm blue to keep my head up  
Or even lead me to my promised land,  
Soften the hearts of advertising agents  
And turn indifferent glances to a smile,  
Beguiling beauty with its sexual pageants –  
Oh! one deserves some luck once in a while!

# *Other Pre-war Poems*

## *Home\**

How awful to live in a horrible house  
Where there's nothing to eat but cold chicken and  
grouse  
And there's nothing but barking and horrible noise  
And the sound of a harsh, unpleasant Voice,  
Where a really fine couple of beautiful cats  
Are kept in the basement as though they were rats –  
And a permanent wireless to keep us in error  
By means of continued false humour and terror,  
With everything run to a penny and mean  
And everyone asking you 'Where have you been?'  
Or 'Where are you going?' and 'What did you do?'  
To make everyone nervous, bad-tempered and blue –  
And there's nothing but illness and feeling rotten  
And worrying over what's better forgotten,  
Sadism, anaemia, anxiety neurosis  
To make our dear home such a sweet bed of roses

How awful to live where a horrible Dog  
Is pampered and petted as though he were God  
And all love is destroyed but not malice and fear  
Though a code of good manners still flourishes there  
And our laughter adorns such hysterical scenes  
As a meal off cold mutton, potatoes and greens  
How awful to see the same faces each day  
So full of self-pity, disgust and dismay,  
To hear the same voices that say the same things  
And the dog having fits every time the bell rings –  
O could one imagine an atmosphere fitter  
To make one depressed, antisocial and bitter?

\* Written in 1938, unemployed and living at home, full of adolescent rebelliousness and bad temper

# *John Betjeman's Brighton*

*For Charles Rycroft*

Lovely in the winter sunshine lies the Haslemere Hotel,  
Near the Homeleigh and the Sussex, home of ex-King  
Manoel.

Lager in the West Pier Tavern, cocktails in the  
Metropole,  
Who can spot Lord Alfred Douglas – not the gross and  
coarse of soul!

Stained our hands, our lips polluted, with a sinful  
cigarette,  
We who saw 'The Dance of Love' – we are not likely to  
forget  
Those moustaches and those knickers, seen through that  
machine of shame.  
Palace Pier, beloved of wavelets, hushed the breath that  
bears thy name!

We remember shouting breakfasts, old men who forgot  
their teeth,  
Exchanging photographs of nurses, symptoms, means  
to gain relief.  
We remember that Pavilion, Moorish, with chinoiserie,  
And the Ice Rink and the High Street, Fuller's layer-cake  
for tea!

Still we see those sugar-daddies flashing by in  
terraplanes,  
On the Hove Lawns lonely colonels fight again their last  
campaigns;  
Wickedly we drank our coffee in Sherry's where the bad  
girls go,  
From the balcony we watched them bathed in purple  
light below.

O Finlandia, heavenly music, played by massed bands on  
the pier,  
O those automatic palmists, how I wish that I were there!  
O pin tables, Russian billiards, where the ball melodious  
clicks,  
And the languid coloured postcards, bathing-girls of  
1906!

O voluptuous! O ecstatic! O that convalescent air!  
In the sun those terraced houses, wonderful wonderful  
Regency Square!  
There among the winds of winter we were gay in spite of  
gales,  
Still a memory we cherish though the recollection pales

# War Poems (1940–46)

## Sonnet, 1940

The point where beauty and intelligence meet,  
Where intersecting lines cross and divide –  
Happy were I to lie between those feet  
Or by that rare and warm and lovely side –  
You are the centre of my moving world,  
The cold ideal to which I daily move  
Although iron flags of battle are unfurled –  
You are not yet, though might still be, my love.  
And I, before the happy tough battalions  
Engulf me or the frozen seas of Norway,  
Have still my dreams of cities and of dalliance,  
But most of you as standing in a doorway,  
Who might, though I so dissipate my life,  
Be mistress or, fear of the young, a wife.

## *The Bofors A A Gun*

Such marvellous ways to kill a man!  
An 'instrument of precision', a beauty,  
The well-oiled shining marvel of our day  
Points an accusing finger at the sky.  
– But suddenly, traversing, elevating madly,  
It plunges into action, more than eager  
For the steel blood of those romantic birds  
That threaten all the towns and roads.  
O, that man's ingenuity, in this so subtle,  
In such harmonious synchronization of parts,  
Should against man be turned and he complaisant,  
The pheasant-shooter be himself the pheasant!

## *Officers' Mess*

It's going to be a thick night to-night (and the night  
before was a thick one),  
I've just seen the Padre popping in to 'The Virgin's  
Womb' for a quick one  
I don't mind telling you this, old boy, we got the Major  
drinking –  
You probably know the amount of gin he's in the habit of  
sinking –  
And then that new MO came in, the Jewish one, awful  
fellow,  
And his wife, a nice little bit of stuff, dressed in a flaming  
yellow  
Looked a pretty warmish piece, old boy – no, have this  
one with me –  
They were both so blind (and so was the Major) that they  
could hardly see  
She had one of those amazing hats and a kind of silver fox  
fur  
(I wouldn't mind betting several fellows have had a go at  
her)  
She made a bee-line for the Major, bloody funny, old  
boy,  
Asked him a lot about horses and India, you know,  
terribly coy –  
And this MO fellow was mopping it up and at last he  
passed right out  
(Some silly fool behind his back put a bottle of gin in his  
stout)  
I've never seen a man go down so quick Somebody  
drove him home  
His wife was almost as bad, old boy, said she felt all alone  
And nestled up to the Major – it's a great pity you weren't  
there –  
And the Padre was arguing about the order of Morning  
and Evening Prayer

Never laughed so much in all my life. We went on  
drinking till three.  
And this bloody woman was doing her best to sit on the  
Major's knee!  
Let's have the blackout boards put up and turn on the  
other light.  
Yes, I think you can count on that, old boy – to-night'll  
be a thick night.

## *Sonnet*

We make mistakes, my darling, all the time,  
Love where we are not wanted, sigh alone,  
Simply because our passions are not tame.  
No fairy story dragons to be slain,  
Our living difficulties are not so simple.  
Huge effort cannot bring a love to birth,  
The future offers no instructive sample  
Of what's to come upon a warlike earth.

O, if I had time back and you to kiss  
I would not now reject your wasted sweetness,  
But meet the tide and fullness of your love  
(If some invisible god would stoop to bless  
And cancel my love's blindness and its lateness),  
That now ebbs from me daily, wave by wave.

## *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Aircrews have had it and the war goes on  
And I have had it if I die to-morrow,  
Not needing the marvellous conceits of Donne  
Or any word of fear or sound of sorrow  
Love I have had, the climax of all lives,  
Traditionally the enemy of death,  
That like an Old Testament prophet power-dives  
And takes away the hard-drawn, precious breath

Yeats read much in old poets all his life  
And prophecies and dreams of golden sages,  
Condensed past wisdom into a few pages,  
But in his passionate intellectual strife  
Had not the art new generations praise,  
To cram a lifetime into seven days

## *Sonnet*

Armies, like homes once hated, feed and clothe  
And occupy with certain dull routine,  
Are Fathers, strict, and cannot ever soothe,  
Nor see what lovers with clear eyes have seen  
Good at its job, the soldierly, keen eye  
Combs fields for gun sites and the sky for planes,  
Landscapes suggest campaigns – but you and I  
Are too fine detail on those endless plains  
Where generals are romping ‘Personnel’  
Would be our label, we are on their files  
And where you are no flag will ever tell  
Although my love for you should cover miles  
Known to the wise, for you I write it out –  
There are two worlds, within us and without



# Oxford Leave

'The Lamb and Flag' was closed, so I went to the  
Randolph Hotel

And saw there several faces that I remember too well,  
War-time and peace-time faces, R A F operational types,  
Girls who were arty and tarty – and several blokes with  
pipes.

Young undergraduate faces and over there by the door  
Under a smart and once fashionable hat what might  
(perhaps) be a whore.

I stood there like Charles Madge, observing, with the  
ginger beer I had bought  
(The war had done away with the beer) and to myself I  
thought

*Et ego in Arcadia vixi* and wore undergraduate clothes,  
No one here is different from me essentially,  
I suppose. . .

*Plus ça change* . . . and a donnish type, a rather  
middle-aged queen,

Gave me a look, not a dirty look, I knew what that look  
could mean.

Behind my back was a shocker with a handlebar  
moustache

Treating a blonde to a *Dubonnet sec* and his laugh was loud  
and harsh.

A rather passé arty woman invited a boy to her home  
'We're going to have fish and chips, my dear, really we'd  
like you to come.'

On my left two rich young men were busy discussing the  
tart,

Two well-fed minds without, I should say, a single  
constructive thought.

Ah, youth! and how time passes! Was it really five years  
ago

That I left my Alma Mater? Yes, time is not so slow.

It takes the loves and the parties but nostalgically in the  
brain  
And even in the Army, their memories remain  
And these are all real people, not the distortions of  
dream,  
And though one might not believe it, they're all of them  
what they seem

## *Cigarette for the Bambino*

*Hey, Joe! Cigarette! Cioccolat'!*  
*Egg and chips?*  
*Wanna cat, wanna drink?*  
*Vermouth a very good*  
*Very nice*  
*Wanta girl? Wanta woman?*

In the filthy streets of handsome towns  
Black Market kids accost the soldiers –  
Under the pictures of the Virgin Mary  
Whores give themselves for tins of bully  
And still amidst a starving population  
The priests ecclesiastically waddle  
As fat and sinister as any gangster  
Catholicism, black market of the soul,  
That holds this wretched country down,  
Corrupted state, corrupted crown,  
Dangles its tarnished tinkling Heaven  
Above this maze of medieval squalor

Gone all the good of European culture,  
The hangover of 'taste' in tawdry chapels,  
Fat cherubs and madonnas puffed like clouds,  
A throbbing, over-sexed and maudlin music –  
O, that the centuries should show so little!

The beauty of the girls and children  
Shining through rags, their friendliness,  
The easy kindness of a Latin people,  
Lacking the hardness of the French,  
Brutality of the conceited German,  
Deserve a better heritage than this.

*Naples 31 May, 1944*

## *When a Beau Goes In*

When a Beau goes in,  
Into the drink,  
It makes you think,  
Because, you see, they always sink  
But nobody says 'Poor lad'  
Or goes about looking sad  
Because, you see, it's war,  
It's the unalterable law.

Although it's perfectly certain  
The pilot's gone for a Burton  
And the observer too  
It's nothing to do with you  
And if they both should go  
To a land where falls no rain nor hail nor driven snow –  
Here, there or anywhere,  
Do you suppose *they* care?

You shouldn't cry  
Or say a prayer or sigh.  
In the cold sea, in the dark,  
It isn't a lark  
But it isn't Original Sin –  
It's just a Beau going in.

# Poems (1946-64)

## *Young Blondes*

*A religious poem*

Young blondes are tempting me by day and night,  
Young blondes in dreams trouble my restless sight

With curly heads they rampage through my thoughts,  
Full-bosomed in their sweaters and their shorts

Or lie sunbathing on an impossible beach  
Naked, aloof, continually out of reach

On the mind's promenade, above the rocks,  
Young blondes go sauntering by in cotton frocks

Or flatter cameras with their negligent poses  
Or drenched in moonlight gather midnight roses

While I am eating, smoking, working, talking  
Through long romantic gardens they are walking

Protect me, Lord, from these desires of flesh,  
Keep me from evil, in Thy pastures fresh,

So that I may not fall, by lakes or ponds,  
Into such sinful thoughts about young blondes!

## *Spring Song*

Efficiency in offices is found  
And love in basements and in two-room flats  
And death traditionally under ground.

There are no new equations to propound –  
Although we get as drunk and blind as bats  
Efficiency in offices is found.

The Life Force, always, pushes us around  
Until they lay us out like table mats  
With death traditionally under ground.

Perhaps a parson black and trimly gowned  
Will speak of us while friends remove their hats –  
Efficiency in offices is found.

So get the girls and get the whisky downed  
While we're alive we're luckier than cats  
And death traditionally under ground.

Let love and beauty dance and music sound  
The land be gay with lambs, the sea with sprats –  
Efficiency in offices is found  
And death, traditionally, under ground.

## *Extravagance*

Extravagance must have its day  
So that one learns the easy way  
That overspending doesn't pay.

Much buying compensates in part  
For inferiority in art  
And failure in affairs of the heart.

We know that fortune is a bitch  
But the illusion of being rich  
Keeps us content and stable, which,

Like drinking wine with every meal,  
Prevents the Guilt we ought to feel  
And dulls the lack of the Ideal

## *To the Muses*

In the fat butteries of the South  
And in the North unknown to fame  
The words are dead in the god's mouth,  
The priest forsakes the sacred flame

Language, once vital to our lives,  
Maintains a perilous underground  
With peasants and in jiving dives  
Where transatlantic musics sound

Old English with Old England dies  
And dim Whitehall restrains the tongue,  
The broadcast word's civilities  
Infect the breath in every lung

Fair Nine! Return to us again,  
Return with pentecostal fire,  
Revitalise the voice and pen  
That now are starved of their desire!

# *Hymn to Proust*

For you Time Past could not forget  
Nor alter what had been –  
And Time has still its lost Odette  
And Love its Albertine.

We worship under different names  
The figures of the past,  
Like characters from Henry James –  
But not designed to last.

For we know many a Charlus still  
And many a Verdurin,  
Gilberte as Swann and de Forcheville,  
And M. Legrandin.

Each, an ambiguous Saint-Loup,  
Carries Françoise within,  
And sex comes to its Waterloo  
In Jealousy, not Sin.

For all know Vinteuil's little phrase,  
The brilliant Balbec day,  
The Méséglise and Guermantes' ways,  
The greyness of Combray.

Each one has tasted as a child  
Madeleines dipped in tea  
And loves that drove the reason wild  
But set the fancy free.

## *A Music Lover*

I listen to my gramophone  
Proclaim a masterwork  
Unhindered by the telephone  
Or memories of Dunkirk

Nobody can admire me,  
My neatly-tied bow-tie,  
And no one can desire me  
For so alone am I

My cigarette and holder,  
My little polished feet,  
Smoke floats above my shoulder  
Oh so efftely sweet!

I am the priest and priestess,  
My nightly cult is sound  
At altars where the least is  
By contemplation crowned

## *After Heine*

*With an Irish accent*

The old malicious stories,  
The hymns of love and hate  
Oh, let us see them buried  
In a coffin huge and great

For much will I lay in it  
(But what, I will not say)  
The coffin must be larger  
Than the whole of Dublin Bay



A monstrous bier bring also  
Of boards both strong and thick;  
It must be long, much longer  
Than the road to Limerick.

And bring me twelve great giants –  
They must be stronger far  
Than Greek and groaning Atlas  
Or wrestling angels are.

They must drag out the coffin,  
And plunge it in the waves;  
For coffins so gigantic  
Must have gigantic graves.

Then say why is the coffin  
So heavy and so vast?  
It bears my loves and sorrows  
Together in it cast.

## *British Guiana* \*

When the blue sackies fly down from courida trees  
And the jumbies are out on the Corentyne coast,  
When the cabbage-palms stir in a Caribbean breeze –  
This is the moment that I miss the most!

When the vicissi duck fly high in the evening light  
And the rough trunks of samans loom into the sky,  
Black against sunset, mysterious, scented night!  
Jasmine envelops me, warm the wind's sigh!

\* This piece of imaginary nostalgia, written in London in 1953, draws its colourful flora and fauna entirely from one novel by Edgar Mittelholzer.

Mournful the call of the big yellow kiskadees,  
Tempting the tarts at the Viceroy Hotel –  
Mango, jamoon, sapodilla and breadfruit trees,  
Dark Demerara that I love too well!

What am I here but the slave of the businessman?  
Who knows or cares what exactly I am?  
Carry me back on the wings of a chicken hawk,  
Carry me back there, to New Amsterdam!

## *Huckstep*

Huckstep was the groundsman at my prep school  
He put the heavy roller over the pitch,  
Dragged by a horse in large flat leather shoes,  
In those long-vanished summers  
A handsome smiling man and sunburned, quiet,  
The brownest man I'd ever seen,  
Dark oily hair and powerful arms in shirt sleeves  
He played, somebody told me, for the Kent Second  
Eleven,  
Certainly he bowled at us in the nets,  
Left arm medium, round the wicket,  
With a beautiful action, a back-tossed lock of hair

Now that I've been 'literary' for so many years  
I recognize him He might have been  
Lady Chatterley's lover, Ted in *The Go-Between*,  
The natural man A Kentish yeoman  
Who even then charmed me with his grace –  
So that for ever I shall see him bowling,  
Picture the wheeling arm, the fluent action  
His name is one of those like 'Adlestrop'  
That, once absorbed, can never be forgotten  
Huckstep We all admired him  
And who, if he was as I think he was, would not?  
There is a place in life for simple people

# *Londoners (1964)*

## *Chelsea in Winter*

It's a long pull down the King's Road and down to the  
Pier Hotel

To the Thames where the turbulent seagulls float  
backwards on the swell

As muffled in my duffle coat

Unruffled in my duffle coat

I walk the streets of Hell.

Intellectual introspective streets of the higher income  
brackets

Trodden by Mr Eliot's feet and the leaders of the rackets\*

Where artists in their duffle coats

Feel smartest in their duffle coats

Like cigarettes in packets.

The Carlyle statue, pondering, sits wrapped in gloomy  
thought,

And warns that Human Wisdom still may be too dearly  
bought –

When duffle coat meets duffle coat

Each passes like a river boat

Towards its final port!

\* Refers particularly to portrait painters.

## *Tennysonian Reflections at Barnes Bridge*

The river flows before my door,  
Sad with sea-gulls, mute with mud  
Past Hammersmith and Castelnau,  
And strung with barges at the flood  
Pink rowing girls by eight and four  
Gently stroke the tide of blood

A railway runs from side to side  
And trains clank over on the hour  
The rowers strain and stretch and slide,  
Hair like chrysanthemums, the flower  
Of girlhood not yet opened wide,  
Each happy in her virgin power

The dying sun, the dying day  
With sunlight charms suburban reaches,  
The hackneyed river flows away,  
And Time runs too, experience teaches,  
Nor for the boring bard will stay  
Or rowing girls as fresh as peaches

# South Kensington

## 1 The Natural History Museum

*What man is*

In a vast Gothic cathedral devoted to Life  
Sit Darwin and Huxley like twin, uncomfortable saints,  
More serious than the stuffed and innocent animals  
At bay yet serene in their clean glass cages,  
Cleanly divided into separate species  
By omnipotent Man in his function as Providence.

At the top of the stairs, however, is evidence  
That for some animals there was no surrender  
To the clean shot and the heroic eye –

No less than the bust of a Victorian hunter\*  
With a name, a date, a place and above them  
Words now grown too familiar – KILLED IN ACTION.  
And Natural History, like all History, has its martyrs.

To feed the young with knowledge, some animals must  
suffer.

To feed some animals, some animals must suffer.

Not animals alone in permanent Apartheid  
Are regarded by man (an animal) as different –  
The list has been long and is being extended:  
Huns Jews Poles Czechs Japs Reds Blacks Whites.

Life is less passionate in Museums of Natural History.

\* The inscription reads: 'Captain Frederick C Selous, DSO, Hunter, Explorer and Naturalist. Born 1851. Killed In Action at Beho-Beho, German East Africa, 4.1.1917.' It is easy to misread this memorial statement. Having regard to the date and place of his death, I should have realized that he died from human 'enemy action' and was not struck down by the vengeful paw of a lion.

## *2 The Victoria and Albert Museum*

### *What man creates*

Over a huge arched doorway stands Albert  
And at his feet in capitals the one word ALBERT  
Inside are pots, paintings, prints, pincushions,  
Every imaginable artifact by which Art is honoured –  
But nothing primitive or pornographic  
(For the creative output of primitive man  
One must go, as parliamentarians say, 'to another place'  
For pornography, to the British Museum Library  
Or the royal collection of drawings at Windsor )

No, this is Art This is sophisticated This is what Man  
Has made for his pleasure and for his use  
Not entirely free from Sex and Religion,  
But innocently, in general, serving the senses  
From India, for example, a many-armed goddess  
Does penance till forgiven by Siva  
Chinese, the vases are proud of their coloration  
Greek, the vases are proud of their shapeliness  
And Moslem art has eliminated man entirely  
In a profusion of pure patterns  
Pleasing to geometers (and perhaps to God)

In a room on their own the Raphael Cartoons  
Are glorying in their Renaissance splendour,  
Turned long ago into looking glass tapestry  
(So that here the Apostles bless and curse left-handed)  
On one wall is an English example,  
The Miraculous Draught of Fishes,  
Made at Mortlake in the Seventeenth Century

Art gives with many hands, a many-armed goddess,  
Gives that we may take, in the joy of creation,  
In our varying degrees of contemplation  
Only here, Music is absent – except in the evenings  
When the late quartets of Beethoven  
Shrill the calm air with their grasshopper stridency

Man is alone not an art-hating animal  
(Where is the dog that can whistle you Mozart?  
Or the cat that fully appreciates Picasso?).  
Better to say: most animals are indifferent,  
Except to the peacock displays of their courtship  
(Art with a Purpose). Although Darwin  
Once played the bassoon to some earthworms  
And observed a reaction.

Art, from religion and magic, a divine child,  
A child of necessity, a many-armed goddess.  
Art is Art  
And she lives in South Kensington.

### *3 The Brompton Oratory and Holy Trinity, Brompton*

*What man believes*

Close to the Oratory – a good building, for a change –  
Cardinal Newman is leading a kindly light,  
Testifying to the Faith in all winds and weathers.  
Hidden beside it, the antiphonal Protestant  
Voice of Holy Trinity is raised in protest:  
'We shall this day by God's grace in England  
Light such a candle as (I trust) shall not easily be put out'.  
Was it Latimer or Ridley? The light is fading,  
The figures grow dim. The figures in firelight,  
The burning zeal of Smithfield, the army of sectaries.  
Through a pall of smoke, from a far hill of time,  
We observe the ambiguous drift of the action.  
What were they doing? And why did they do it?

There are many paths that lead to Believing,  
The heart of man is criss-crossed with so many  
That the original motive is wound like a spool,  
Wound with the many-coloured silken threads of action.  
Fear of Death? or Fear of the Future?  
(And the Future in any case means Death).  
The comfort and calm of a Father Figure  
Big enough to protect a deplorable universe?

Who can see? Who can know? The spool remains hidden,  
The thread is never completely unwound, until  
Time pulls it clear – and the answer is Death

'Let us leave Heaven to the sparrows',  
But let those that believe continue to believe,  
Continue to extract the old (false?) comfort  
For the one situation that never changes

#### *4 The Science Museum*

*What man knows*

The deities here are Galileo, Newton and Einstein  
Galileo has a full-length statue,  
Newton and Einstein are, more modestly, busted  
They are the big wheels

Wheels within wheels Stephenson's 'Rocket',  
Watt's Beam Engine and 'Puffing Billy',  
The Blenkinsop Locomotive (this one a model)  
Like the skeletons of prehistoric animals  
The earliest engines have a kind of pathos,  
Survivals in a more sophisticated age  
Steam, electricity, and (now) atomic energy

But the wheel Whoever invented the wheel  
Was the greatest and most original mechanical genius  
This, one may say, was the beginning  
Of man's intermittent raids on the vastness  
Of Time and Space, changing the here and now  
For a new and surprising there and then

Wheels within wheels But what man knows  
Is more than the quickest ways to move himself about  
Human knowledge is never regrettable,  
Although its uses are often regrettable  
It is better to know than not to know,  
As, in other words, said Dr Johnson



We are like the children who turn the handles  
And press the buttons. We accept without question  
Discovery and invention of our brainier fathers.  
Throughout our world the wheels are turning –  
But the man who invented the wheel is forgotten.

### *5 Excavation Road*

#### *Man is a political animal*

In Excavation Road the traffic crawls.  
Progress is slow. The street is full of words  
Like HALT and MEN AT WORK. On the long hauls  
The diesels fume and fret. Above, the birds  
Show no regard for what goes on below.  
The family cars, the lovers' scooters come  
All to one common stop. The fast, the slow.

There might well be an answer in the sum  
Of small progressions to infinity  
(Some praise the closed captivity of trains) –  
Meanwhile, in holes, the men work carefully,  
Avoiding the sky-high-blowing, dangerous mains.

# Madame Tussaud's

## 1 The Grand Hall (First Floor)

Past the waxwork girl at the publications desk,  
Past the waxwork attendant at the turn of the stair,  
To the first floor, to the Grand Hall  
And we have ascended into a heaven of Top People –  
Historic Ministers, Royal Group, Conservative  
Government Group,  
Labour Opposition Group, Famous Warriors,  
Ecclesiastical Group,  
American Presidents and Statesmen, Modern Statesmen  
and Notabilities

What is one's first impression? A musty smell  
Not like the damp dusty smell of books in libraries,  
Nor like the dry central-heated sunshine in museums  
Something to do with the robes and the regalia?  
Some chemical to protect the clothes from moth?

Be that as it may, here is Churchill,  
Sad and lonely in the Order of the Garter,  
Set apart in the eminence of an Elder Statesman  
Macmillan, with his Cabinet around him,  
Like a bored walrus in an Old Etonian tie  
Gaitskell with his lips pursed \*  
Antony Charles Robert Armstrong-Jones†  
On the edge of the Royal Group, and looking  
As though the modeller had been tempted to impart  
Something of the features of the late King George the  
Sixth

\* This was written in 1960

† Now Lord Snowdon 'He was educated at Eton and Jesus College, Cambridge, and received his rowing Blue as coxswain of Jesus College's first boat, also directing the Cambridge University eight to its victory over Oxford in 1950' – Madame Tussaud's Exhibition, *Guide and Biographies* Throughout the poem there are many 'references' to this valuable document

Khrushchev gives solidity. de Gaulle gives height.  
On the raised platform he seems about ten feet tall.  
Is it the platform? Or is it Company policy  
To add some dignified inches to the possessors of status?  
Certainly the great are great – but here they seem  
enormous.  
And certainly the murderers in the Chamber of Horrors  
Seem relatively tiny (but then they are standing  
With their feet on the ground, at exactly the same level  
As you and I).

## *2 Hall of Tableaux No. 1 (Second Floor)*

Waxworks that neither eat nor sleep,  
Make love or feel that they are human,  
Can freeze in action, freeze so deep  
They shame those fidgets – Man and Woman.

Here Mary kneels and waits the axe,  
Ready to kneel and wait for ever,  
Nelson dies under French attacks  
And grapples Hardy in his fever.

Napoleon (death mask) lies in state.  
'When did you last see your Father?'  
Question unanswered. They can wait.  
Time is no object, Life no bother.

Guy Fawkes is playing a children's game  
Like 'Hide and Seek' or 'Hunt the Slipper' –  
Slow matches, touchwood, but no flame –  
No spark of life in that dead cellar.

Forrest and Dighton moving in,  
Lantern held high, draw near the Princes.  
No beating hearts, no thoughts of Sin,  
No apologies, no defences.

No words. For waxworks, unlike us,  
Possess their souls in perfect patience.  
They make the minimum of fuss,  
Happy to keep, and know, their stations

A self-portrait of Mme Tussaud at the age of eighty-one,  
Dressed like Mrs Grundy, obtrudes among the  
Tableaux

Here also is The Original Guillotine Knife  
Used for cutting aristocrats down to size,  
Used, in fact, on Louis and on Marie Antoinette –  
'The gruesome paraphernalia of History' – another  
reminder.

And (Culture at last!) a Literary Tableau  
Where Walter Scott stands (modelled from life  
In Edinburgh in 1828) 'The last outstanding liabilities  
Were cleared on the security of his copyrights'  
And, sitting at a table, an improbable group  
Wells, Barrie, Kipling, Hardy, Shaw  
Shaw in the chair As though a public meeting  
Were about to begin, or a team photograph,  
Or even a Brains Trust But no living writer  
Confronts us with his genius No Eliot, no Forster  
And Yeats, Joyce, Lawrence are not represented –  
As though Literature came to a full stop in 1910  
Here, there is no doubt, the sword is mightier than the  
pen

### *3 Top Landing (Hitler and Stalin)*

Roped off in opposite corners, unexpectedly mild and  
peaceful,  
Alone, with nothing but the ghostly  
Cheering and suffering multitudes of the years of power,  
Stand Hitler and Stalin

Mussolini has vanished – melted down, forgotten  
Like the junior partner in a cross-talk act  
When one survives the other. Hitler and Mussolini!  
Names once as close as Sullivan and Gilbert,  
Layton and Johnstone, Flotsam and Jetsam.  
Alas for fame! for infamy! for both!

Hitler. Stalin.

Great crimes were once committed in these names;  
Jews, Kulaks, Party Members, millions  
Died when these voices spoke, or when these hands  
Put bloody pens to paper. It is right  
That they should now stand meekly in this Limbo,  
Not in the Hall of Kings nor even yet  
Among the dumb defenceless murderers  
Whose crimes were trivial.

They were a different sort, who in the mass  
Knew that a lie could work and thrive like yeast;  
Leavening their doughy, sheep-like populations  
With hates and fears until, like bitter bread,  
They rose. And followed them  
Into a hell where men burned down like wax  
And personality was charred away  
To leave obedience only to these names:  
Hitler. Stalin.

#### *4 Hall of Tableaux No. 2 (Second Floor)*

Here are the VCs. Whose names are known  
Mainly in the Regimental Histories. Whose bravery  
Many would like to share (and I for one).  
Eighteen of them, and all from World War Two.

No memory returns from World War One;  
Those earlier heroes are reported missing,  
Choked in the mud or scarecrowed on the wire,  
Sprawled in a trench, lit by the Very lights,

Shelled, mortared, gassed  
They have achieved no immortality  
Among these men whose names are writ in wax

—As though the heart of man can only hold  
One war, and that the latest, in its grasp  
All others as remote — places and dates —  
As Wellington's and Marlborough's campaigns

Takers of life Yes, Murder has a way  
Of putting his sly hand on deeds of honour,  
Is never far from politics and war  
Like saints and martyrs these were brave And yet  
In cooler minds a peacetime thought is heard  
Surely a man has better things to do?

Pass to Celebrities of Past and Present,  
To Radio, Stage and Screen (Dors and Monroe —  
To cheer us with a fleeting glance at Sex)

Sports Section Here one sees how flesh  
Is merely parodied by flesh-in-wax  
Wax legs of tennis girls and footballers  
Have a smooth dusty look Fine hairs and veins  
That give real legs their living dullnesses,  
Their softness and their warmth — these are not here

Faces in suits — all right, and real enough  
But not the body, not the man himself,  
Still less the woman, object of desire

### *5 Hall of Kings (First Floor)*

Down to the Hall of Kings, those effigies  
Come round out of a Children's History  
Noteworthy only Cromwell (with his wart)  
And Charles', his victim's wrinkle-picking beard  
Note how, quite reconciled, they stand and stare  
Across a chasm of three hundred years

## 6 *The Chamber of Horrors*

Down to the lowest circle. On the walls,  
As mimicking the prisoners of the past,  
Contemporary names are scratched and scrawled,  
By the descending steps.  
A notice here says 'Portrait Models of  
Notorious Murderers'. All of them are numbered.  
Look them up. Some of them you will know  
From seeing their pictures in the Sunday papers  
(Heath's too-good-looking, slightly foxy, features).

Begin at the beginning. Youngman, Mahon and  
Podmore,  
Bywaters and Mrs Thompson (a bad business  
For Law, for Justice, for Judges, and for her).

Medieval Tortures. A Diorama. Like an Italian  
Cinquecento painting. Wheels and trees, galloping  
horses.

Sadists at work and play in a brown landscape.

George Joseph Smith – and, look, 'The Actual Bath  
In which Smith drowned Miss Lofty'  
Pleads with the dumbness of ironmongery  
'Not guilty'. An instrument only. Never thought.  
Dougal (Moat Farm) and Cream – neurotic knave  
Who poisoned tarts in drugged euphoria.  
And Mrs Dyer, the wicked baby-farmer of the ballad,  
A strong-willed woman executive, a career woman,  
Not caring much how many little bundles  
Were thrown into the Thames. Business comes first.

'Notorious Murderers'. What marks them out?  
Well, most of them are small, and this might be  
Past malnutrition of a criminal class.  
But then there are the bourgeois psychopaths.  
They are small, too. Would this be contribution  
To their conception of a great 'I am'  
Doing what it likes and taking human life  
To satisfy their own 'great' needs and wishes?  
A Divine Right to treat themselves like Kings?

So much for theory Back to the Catalogue  
The Mannings look distinguished  
Crippen is very mild, sad and respectable –  
He had a raw deal from a ghastly wife  
And cut up rough  
Charles Peace is black-faced like a nigger minstrel  
(‘He is shown in one of his disguises’).  
Chessman, unlucky pawn,  
Strapped in a chair ends twelve years’ waiting  
The Torture of The Hooks And Burke and Hare  
Looking like a couple of railway porters  
In their peaked caps Ready and willing, both,  
To knock off any old bags for a living  
And spirit themselves away on whisky  
John Reginald Halliday Christie,  
The Great Necrophile (my capitals) Responsible –  
If you count himself – for the deaths of ten people  
His wife, five whores\* and Evans, Evans’s wife and  
child  
Here in the fatal kitchen he is monarch of all he surveys

Landru, Courvoisier, Palmer, Wainwright, Haigh  
Dumollard and his Wife – French peasants who  
With peasant cunning decoyed eighteen young girls,  
Garrotted them  
And on the wall, framed like a Testimonial,  
A letter from the Master Jack the Ripper  
To the Chief of the Metropolitan Police  
‘Dear Boss – I keep hearing the police have caught me  
But they won’t fix me just yet ’

#### Ancient and Modern

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette,  
Robespierre and Hebert, Fouquier-Tinville,  
Carrier – mouth-bleeding, pallid *Têtes de Morts*  
And Marat in his blood bath, frozen meat

\* This is not entirely accurate Miss Eady, one of Christie’s victims, was in fact a ‘lady’



Iron Masks of Infamy to distort the features,  
Spiked belts and thumbscrews – all the evidence  
That man, to man, is crueller than the wolf.

So out. Into the open air  
And pleased, at last, to light a cigarette.

## *Harrods*

Harrods – stronghold of the Establishment!  
Some people worship the Royal Family,  
A kind of second religion. And for such  
There's something sacred in the name of Harrods,  
Divinity hedging every Royal Appointment.  
Some make a pilgrimage each Saturday  
To walk round Harrods, just to meet their friends.  
Some women from a garment bought at Harrods  
Will cut the name and sew it slyly in  
The inside neck of (say) a cheap new coat.  
Deceitful cats and snobbish, silly bitches!  
Conservatives and *Daily Telegraph* readers!\*

Enough (too much) of partisan abuse –  
Enough to say that on such people's hearts  
Harrods established a strong stranglehold  
That now cannot be broken. And, at that,  
One cannot say that it is Harrods' fault  
If people buy their snobbery from them.  
If not from them, they'd get it somewhere else.

I am myself, by virtue of descent,  
An Old Harrodian,  
Card-carrying Party member. On that first Honours List  
Of those deemed worthy to buy on account  
Were names of credit:  
Lillie Langtry, Ellen Terry, Oscar Wilde.

\* *C'est un Jacobin qui parle*

After the First World War  
My mother, with myself, two sisters and a dog  
Would walk across Hyde Park from Albion Street  
To shop at Harrods Bringing her small convoy in  
As sheepdogs worry home the wandering sheep

But the building?  
Stevens and Munt (1901 to 1905)  
The building in its way is very fine,  
Symbolic of the Harrods way of life  
Imposing Solid Not to be knocked down  
By any one 'conventional' kind of bomb,  
And pinkish-orange in each perfect brick

Harrods in 1849 – a modest grocer  
But after two initial Harrods (H C , C D )  
In 1891 upon the scene  
Came Richard Burbidge, due to play a part  
As the main actor in the time to come,  
Important as his namesake on the stage  
Once graced by Shakespeare  
Imperial expansion followed soon

In 1894  
'Lord Esher, Master of the Rolls,  
Stated from the Bench that Harrods Stores  
Was one of the most interesting and beautiful  
establishments  
In the whole of London '\*

Close-carpeted within and warm,  
Perfumed by many women  
With marble Food Halls – where once Wilde perhaps  
Chose delicacies for Bosie's lovely tongue,  
Bees' balls in butter, chocolate-coated ants  
(Or are these fantasies of later date?)

\* *A Century of British Achievement 1849–1949* Privately published  
by Harrods

Luncheon at Harrods! For me, a genuine thrill,  
Still, now, in graceless 1961.  
The Georgian Restaurant, A La Carte Café –  
A well-bred accent on the final 'e' –  
Like stepping onto any West End stage,  
In drawing room comedies of between-the-wars,  
The faces and the voices. Here, most gay,  
The Silver Buffet sports a 'thirties' bar –  
A host of brief encounters, gay divorcees  
Reflected in its mirrors.

Culturewise,  
Tea With An Author in the Georgian Restaurant.  
Commodore Thelwell speaks: 'At Home With Queens'.

Below, in the main hall with leather chairs,  
The portraits on the wall can take it easy:  
Three Burbidges, one Newton,  
All knighted, all. And, but one, never knew  
That they were taken over,  
Or heard at all the powerful name of Fraser.

So fade – or change – the glories of the world.

## *Soho*

Eighteenth-Century houses. Neat. Reasonable.  
Three streets in alphabetical order  
(Reading from West to East):  
Dean, Frith and Greek.

Dryden in Gerrard Street, Mozart in Frith,  
Prodigious infant. Johnson at the Turk's Head.

But look in Soho Square, the 'stately quadrate'  
(A windmill turning then in Rathbone Place)  
First resident Monmouth Lucifer that fell

In a more lucid day  
This was the heart of fashionable London –  
With link boys, chariots, ombre, whist and tea

Routs Public Assemblies  
Of the Nobility and Gentry  
Mrs Cornelys Carlisle House Casanova  
The pleasant titillation of (masked) balls,  
The flaming candles, Chippendale Chinese  
And at the gates the rough unlettered mob  
Ready to throw the old four-letter words

Now a few only of the first remain,  
The original houses Cowed and small  
Beside competitors These parvenus  
Disdain that world of wit and cultured charm,  
The pearls of wisdom The world of Commerce  
Is *their* oyster

This is the architecture dedicated to the proposition  
That all that matters is to show a profit  
And on the Soho houses that remain  
From that Augustan Age are signs  
Of the times Neon invitations  
To eat, drink, watch the girls strip,  
Outraging modesty of mild façade

The streets are full of Mediterranean life,  
Italians, Greeks and Cypriots, Maltese,  
With Huguenot-descended French  
And, as exotic, furtive blooming, BOOKSHOPS  
For here, before the deluge of the Act,  
The connoisseurs bought 'doubles' – 'singles' too,  
The happy snaps that could debauch the eye  
Of schoolboys, sadists, or the very queer

And still the trade in flesh continues here,  
The warm, compliant flesh that knows no Law,  
— but more discreetly. (Every kind of lust  
Is more a kind of love than Judges think.)  
And on the notice boards tarts' cards proclaim  
A change of language, not a change of heart:

ACCOMMODATION

FOR GENTLEMEN ONLY, YOUNG LADY SEEKS  
INTERESTING OCCUPATION, even PRIVATE STRIPTEASE.  
Below, the cryptic cyphers only the dial fully  
understands.

Telephone numbers! magic in their power  
To serve the twentieth century's good time myth,  
The talismans of Northern businessmen.

Less modest once, such cards had photographs,  
Vital statistics, and the hidden words  
That called the initiates to the Mysteries.  
Rainwear. High heels. Bondage. Correction. All  
Like jungle drums to lonely fetishists  
And those whose impulse learned to deviate.  
And this is still a jungle, where at night  
The infantile desires may roam at will  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides.  
Here, in the glistening rain, the mac men come;  
A pack of masochists each night whipped in,  
Slaves of the 'models' with the hunting crops.

Crooks, ponces, whores. You think: a world away  
From eighteenth-century elegance and charm?  
The wise (or cynical) have leave to doubt.

# *South Audley Street I*

## *The Grosvenor Chapel*

The prettiest chapel in town? Yes, I would say,  
Who daily walk by that blue-painted spire,  
Those heavenly proportions 1730  
Raised by what Unknown Christian Soldier  
For 'Real Estate' Sir Richard Grosvenor?  
Tradition says a builder name of Price  
(But non-committally adds 'probably')  
Dug in, threw up defensive walls,  
Fought the good fight  
Where in 1945 the American Forces  
'Gave thanks for the Victory of the Allies'  
Lone outpost now of God Much bombed  
Trinity Chapel, Hanover Chapel, Berkeley Chapel  
Gone

The Mayfair Chapel Gone Their very absence  
In the consuming night of history  
Adds brightness to this one star that remains  
An interior small, sober, decent,  
Whose white and gold seems unemotional  
Faced with the hanging Christ in agony  
Of polychrome, of counterfeited flesh  
'Extensive alterations in the Chapel  
Were carried out under the direction  
Of Mr J N (now Sir Ninian) Comper '

And here John Wilkes – 'A Friend of Liberty' –  
Lies buried, darling of the mob  
And rightly The first four Georges  
Were not above some very tricky stuff,  
The Lords continually threw out Bills  
To stop the hanging of a child of ten,  
The Bishops could not see where it would end  
If capital punishment were not retained

For picking pockets or for knocking off  
Goods to the value of five bob or more.  
(Say half a dollar and you might be right).

So long live Wilkes! Debauched, intemperate Wilkes,  
Whose 'Essay on Woman' (if he wrote it) was  
Death to all Virtue and all Chastity.  
A demagogue who knew a thing or two  
And did a thing or two for Liberty,  
While moderate, unenthusiastic men  
Looked down their long, cold noses, modestly.  
Hurrah for Wilkes! For Wilkes and Liberty!  
But Wilkes is dead. Gone as we all must go,  
As eighteenth-century architecture is hacked down  
By thoughtless navvies with the hands of Time.  
Rubble and dust where once great buildings stood.

## *South Audley Street II*

*Thos. Goode & Co. (London) Ltd*

Architects: George and Peto. 1876  
In giant wrought iron figures clamped  
Onto the fashionable red brick front.  
Late Victorian richness. Granite pillars  
Polished ecclesiastically smooth.  
Behind plate glass, two china elephants  
Stand huge and silent, both ignoring us,  
In china contemplation. As a child  
My mother took me to South Audley Street  
For wedding present buying,  
To Goode's. Those elephants  
(And that was in the Twenties)  
Were even then the tenants of the house,  
Familiar landmarks. Like the Bourbons  
They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

Between the elephants – the magic doors  
Stand on the mat outside and lo!  
They swing wide open and you can step through,  
But close again as your foot leaves the mat  
Symplegades, the far-famed clashing rocks,  
Were not more dangerous or more wonderful  
To that sea-girt, far-flung Odysseus  
Than the glass doors of this emporium  
To me, untravelled, shy, and under ten.

Within, a paradise of china, glass,  
The colours bloom like flowers  
Around the borders of each silent room –  
For all is quiet, refined Here, salesmanship  
Consists in leaving customers alone  
Until the pressure of the atmosphere,  
The sense of what's expected, forces them  
Exploding, into speech, a declaration  
As difficult to voice as words of love,  
And as irrevocable

The purchase made, and deftly wrapped, what joy  
To see again those intricate machines  
That fire like cartridges their tubes of change  
About from place to place!  
Here, to a basement? or some higher floor?  
The vulgar mechanism well concealed

It was not always so On tracks of wire,  
Like trolleybus cables overhead (or New York's El),  
In those far haberdashers of my youth  
The quick projectiles rushed and whirred,  
And landed with a satisfying thud  
A memory, again, of shopping trips  
Made with my mother, and a Scottish dog  
To me those interdepartmental missiles  
Were easily the best part of the shop



Once more, departing, through the magic doors.  
To leave one's childhood and step out again  
Into the world of 1961.  
Forty years on and all that jazz! Ah, yes  
We grow more sentimental as the years go by,  
More self-absorbed, like china elephants.

## *Earls Court*

Earls Court – a bourgeois slum,  
Well the wrong side of that dividing line  
That runs down west of Knightsbridge, north to south,  
Invisible but strong to separate  
All those with Capital from those without.

This is the country of the single room,  
The two-room flat, three single girls who share.  
The secretaries who have families  
In the Home Counties. (Young executives  
Exhaust their nights with noisy male displays  
Of potency in tiger-roaring cars.)  
Home perms and frozen food.  
Nail-varnished stockings where the ladders are!

And students. Indians and Africans, the sons of chiefs,  
Intelligent and well-behaved and far  
Removed from Notting Hill's black heart  
Where the poor whites would carve you for a giggle –  
Though just a mile north as the jim crow flies.

Australians too. In groups in Earls Court Road,  
In solidarity that will not move for prams,  
Like little clots in the pedestrian bloodstream  
That flows along the pavements.

Sweaters and jeans Some beards For in Earls Court  
Live bachelors (boys and girls),  
The adolescents and the very old  
The families with children – very few

The old, like refugees,  
Into the hotels of the Cromwell Road  
Have all retired To leave the world behind,  
With TV, knitting, books and cups of tea

And what has Earls Court got? A Hall  
For Exhibitions, and the Empress Hall  
(For boxing, Louis Armstrong, and the rest),  
New, high and mighty, looms  
The Empress State Building – from Holland Park  
A summer's landmark  
A Station (District and Piccadilly Lines)  
Known to commuters as a terminal  
Victorian streets and squares  
Like living memories  
Of that Great Exhibition (1851)  
Hotels for oldies Restaurants a few  
Churches Some coffee bars for student life  
Some hospitals (my son was born in one)  
Some shops, some pubs Nothing spectacular

What Earls Court has is this  
A sense of free and easy There are no Joneses  
For anybody to keep up with here  
The negroes in the snow are beautiful,  
And you can wear what clothes you damn well please  
No debts No escorts No tycoons But life  
In great variety Eccentrics, too,  
Who in a bus will tell the passengers  
'To-day's the Birthday of The Princess Royal  
I'm telling you because you ought to know '  
A lady neat, precise, a bit insane

Yes, that's the nut-shell truth Earls Court  
Was never smart Nor likely, much, to be

# *The Marble Arch*

Wars never end wars.

The monuments to old victories  
As they stand, grow small. After the first  
Orgiastic erection in youthful pride and hope,  
Are over-shadowed by the later building –  
As now the Marble Arch. The Odeon,  
The Cumberland, have since the Thirties hedged it lushly  
in.

Degraded now, reduced in rank  
To a minor Police Station.

First built to honour Nelson,  
A tribute to that lucky one-armed bandit,  
His victories that turned a French sea British,  
Kept the map pink.  
1828. John Nash. And modelled on  
The Arch of Constantine. Till 1851  
Stood to at Buckingham Palace as main gate.  
Moved then to Tyburn, entrance to Hyde Park.

Where, till the recent reconstruction,  
A triangle of stone set in the road  
(X marks the spot on plans of murders)  
Showed where the gallows stood – that Tyburn Tree  
Providing spectacle and entertainment  
Free for a fun-loving, drunken public  
All in favour of Capital Punishment.

Here in 1305  
Died William Wallace,  
An early martyr to the cause of Scotland.

And still, across the Odeon's wide screen,  
Chase coloured fantasies of lust and pain,  
To prove that violence is part of life  
And for the young a licensed way of love,  
Approved by Censors.

In the cold Thirties here, the unemployed  
Hung sadly round the alleyways and doors,  
Round the fat neck of a rich and stuffy nation –  
A useless, guilt-inducing albatross  
At Speakers' Corner, no further than a shout  
In a high wind would carry, the frenzied agitators  
Cried out for vengeance on the status quo  
Mass Rallies Mounted Police But Politics died  
Of overspending in 1951

The speakers still speak, each one a universe  
Bounded by the theory he proclaims,  
Where only the admissible evidence is admitted  
But the audience sits at home,  
Its senses cosy by the warm TV

And now, under the immutable lovers' trees,  
Where folded like chairs in one another's arms  
They kissed away the summer, under, still,  
Is a giant garage for 1000 cars

## *Park Lane*

The *douceur de vivre* had a good time here  
In the days when to be rich meant that you had good  
taste,  
And even now a few bow-fronted Regency beauties  
Sadly confront the Park,  
Short of paint, short of care,  
Elbowed aggressively by the boorish squareness  
Of the freebooting modern office blocks

Here with the flats and business 'Houses'  
(Indistinguishable and undistinguished)  
They stand reproachful of a way of life

Note, perhaps, among such mediocrity:

1. Fountain House, reverse of No. 80,  
Has, in replica above the door,  
The Dolphin Fountain, Once on my childhood walks  
A landmark. The fountain is removed,  
Disgraced and parked a mile to the North East  
In Regent's Park. There ought to be  
A Society For The Prevention Of The Removal Of  
Fountains.

2. Two huge rival hotels – the Dorchester  
And Grosvenor House. Both built in 1930, the  
Grosvenor first.  
The Dorchester, though, proudly bears the date  
Of 1930. If one has to choose,  
Perhaps it is the better building, more cocksure  
And truly of its period.  
In 1937 I had a girl friend  
Who worked at the Dorchester as a shorthand typist.  
She was sometimes lent  
To visiting celebrities for typing.  
And Maharajahs with their purple lips  
Made passes at her.  
The staff (she said) referred to Grosvenor House  
As 'the jam factory'.

3. At the far end of Park Lane  
The new Hilton Hotel is a gigantic phallus  
Rising like a monster on the boundary of Wolfenden  
country,  
Mayfair – which once was residential.  
And till late 18th Century the May Fair  
Was a scene of unexampled debauchery.  
To-day we are more discreet.

## Hyde Park Corner

London is full of gates, gates through which nobody  
passes  
The Marble Arch, the Wellington Arch at Hyde Park  
Corner;  
The triple gateway entrance to Hyde Park  
Statues do better, within the gates  
Permanently fulfilling the function of statues,  
To stare and to be stared at  
As Byron, pensive on his chunk of marble,  
Achilles, mutilated,\* with his lifted shield  
(The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune),  
A warrior, beaten from the bronze of cannon  
Silenced for ever by Wellington's campaigns  
The monument to Milton is also silent,  
Its heavenly trumpeter now far removed  
From the entrance to Hamilton Place An island site  
Swamped by the tide of progress

Enjoy what still remains

The Wellington Arch is 'crowned  
By a large bronze quadriga representing Peace' †  
By Adrian Jones, MVO  
A group unique, as guide books will suggest,  
'Because the silhouette is practically the same  
From both sides of the arch '

The wonderful Screen Entrance to Hyde Park  
Was erected in 1826,  
Designed by Decimus Burton  
The reliefs copied from the Elgin Marbles

\* This was written when Achilles' fig leaf was not in place,  
removed by an act of vandalism It has since been restored

† All quotations are from *London* – Ward Lock's Red Guide

Both sad and beautiful, in London weather  
They have their dreams of Attica  
But keep them to themselves.

Here Apsley House, the Wellington Museum,  
Faces the equestrian statue of the Duke  
Mounted on Copenhagen (work of Boehm).  
Great Apsley House, a perfect beauty,  
Built in the 1770s by Robert Adam  
On the site of the old Lodge that watched Hyde Park.  
Two years after Waterloo  
Was bought by Wellington.  
In 1830 'the freehold was purchased  
By the trustee of his parliamentary grant',  
Gift of a grateful nation.  
Now houses spoils of war,  
Including a vast statue of Napoleon,  
White marble, by Canova – the last captivity,  
Outlasting Elba and St Helena –  
The conquered as an *objet de vertu*  
In the home of the conqueror.

Here also note  
Goya's huge equestrian portrait of the Duke,  
Too big for stealing.  
Enough Field Marshal's batons  
To fill a knapsack (one for each  
Of the Allied Armies). The table centrepiece  
In silver-gilt, with nymphs, from Portugal,  
Laid for a ghostly banquet never finished,  
Never begun. Murillos. Flemish *genre*.  
A rape of Proserpine, her tits escaping  
Immodestly from the Grecian drapery.  
Dinner services, each plate portraying  
A victory. Great Wellington  
Who never lost a battle!

But once, at orgies, when the gentlemen  
Were drunk on elegant wines by candlelight  
A panel would slide back to show a line  
Of crested silver chamberpots.

Hyde Park Corner is a nest of monuments  
The Artillery Memorial  
Points the fat finger of a howitzer,  
Underlines the agony  
Of manhandling the guns  
The Machine Gun Corps has David,  
Reminiscent of Florence, Michelangelo,  
And marble heroes with their neutral eyes  
Here his inscription reads  
'Saul hath slain his thousands,  
But David his tens of thousands'  
A smug, sadistic epitaph – but happy days  
When cross machine guns meant a megadeath!

St George's Hospital in its new paint  
Revives its dignified incumbency,  
The finest hospital building London has,  
A bust of Hunter underneath one wing

Drive through the underpass – you miss a lot

## *The Museum of British Transport (Clapham)*

If train-spotters are voyeurs (who see their love in action)  
Then a Transport Museum is a collection of dirty  
postcards,  
Static and involving the exercise  
Of the imagination only

This is most true of the prints and the pictures,  
Less so of the models, least of the life-size specimens

The models are beautifully made –  
The B Type omnibus (1910),  
A Trolley-Bus of 1931,



Shillibeer's first omnibus, that ran  
From Marylebone to the City  
On 4 July 1829,  
A real Independence Day for Public Transport.  
G. F. Train's Horse Tram Car (1861)  
Preserves the elegance of horse-drawn coaches.  
Largest and most impressive  
The First Class Coach EXPERIENCE  
(Liverpool and Manchester Railway) –  
A model made by a 16-year-old boy.  
For us, and Freud, and Tennessee Williams  
Only perhaps what we had expected.

Upstairs – a Ceremonial Wheelbarrow  
'Used by Lord Palmerston in turning the first sod'  
In the construction of the Andover and Redbridge  
Railway,  
20 September 1859.  
Dark wood, and grand enough for any drawing-room.

Walk on  
Past fittings, lanterns, crests  
Worn by proud engines like the figureheads  
On sailing ships. Some smooth Victorian painting,  
Where ladies in crinolines converse with gentlemen  
In the upholstered salon set on wheels  
Behind the Iron Horse.

Then out. This was a day\*  
When 'Small Exhibits' only were on view.  
But as a treat, to satisfy the fans,  
A guide conducted us into a huge garage,  
Fit setting for the gems of the collection –  
The old originals, the genuine thing.  
All real (except a replica of the 'Rocket',  
Coupled however to true rolling stock).

Trams of nostalgia! So lately with us, now  
One with the Giant Tortoise, Dodo and Great Auk.

\* Early in 1963, before the whole Museum was open to the public.

Locomotives unnaturally preserved,  
As mammoths in their thick Siberian ice

Note 1) A vintage tram of 1907,  
Belonging to the Sheffield Corporation  
2) A horse tram, well-designed, before  
They skyscrapered to tin collecting-boxes  
For profitable fares  
Deserted they stand (and round them metal signs,  
Platform ticket machines, slot machines for chocolate)  
Bearing the advertising of the vanished brands,  
Whose passengers are long in silent graves  
This is the final terminus The burial ground  
Of elephants that roared and trumpeted

The little sawn-off double-decker buses,  
Types K and S (1919 and '20)  
Are most pathetic More like toys  
Than adult motor transport  
Here, under glass, the dog  
That, stuffed, for years at Wimbledon Station  
Collected for the blind – 'Wimbledon Nell' –  
Looks as though it had been co-opted  
From the Natural History Museum  
Faithful unto death, and knew its station  
Better than most  
When one has Transport in one's blood  
One can never have enough  
Disregard the small meannesses of the bus queue,  
The rush-hour madness Guilty conductresses  
Take the broader view  
How one can sit behind a Chinaman  
On a Routemaster going down Oxford Street  
And, looking over his shoulder, note  
That he is reading a pornographic book

*'Her face had that screwed-up look that the faces of  
middle-aged nymphomaniacs often have'*

A few stops later:

‘ “Where did you learn to drive like that?” I asked.

“By watching the hot-rods on TV – but natch!” was the response.’

How, on a long journey, in one seat, the people change –  
So that next time you look, man has moved on  
From infancy to dim old age; or else flashed back  
From middle age to giggling girlhood,  
Changing his sex as well as occupation.

How once in 1941 at Swindon  
A Troop of Light Anti-Aircraft lived on the junction,  
Guarding the workshops from attack by air,  
Lewis guns mounted on the highest buildings.  
A brother officer and I (one pip each)  
Lived in a Coronation Coach  
(Edward VII's, was it?) in a siding.  
Each morning for our early morning tea  
The batman cadged hot water from some great Express,  
Impatiently boiling. Its life-blood turned to steam.

Transport, like Time and Life, is seldom still  
And well deserves the honour of Museums.

## *Strawberry Hill*

*‘a very proper habitation of, as it was the scene that inspired, the  
author of The Castle of Otranto’*

HORACE WALPOLE

This was the home of a literary man,  
The son of a Prime Minister,  
Who wrote many letters to many people,  
Including the Countess of Upper Ossory,

An urbane, intelligent collector  
Who stimulated an architectural revolution  
And refused to be introduced to Dr Johnson  
Because of his 'blind Toryism and known brutality'

About two thirds of what remains are Walpole's  
The later building – Lady Waldegrave's,  
A rich, attractive Jewess, blossomed out  
In entertaining and Victorian splendour  
The legend says that Shaw,  
Visiting the house long after she was dead,  
Refused to enter her Blue Breakfast Room  
He said it was 'vulgar'

Perhaps the velvet ceiling put him off

And certainly she favoured Tudor doorways,  
While Walpole's ended in a Gothic point  
(She also pulled down Walpole's larger cloister )

A Catholic Training College now inhabits  
The Gothick structure Walpole slowly made  
Out of his 'little play thing house'  
Purchased for fun in 1747

Behind the nailed and Middle-Aged front door  
His fantasy, involved with screens and ceilings,  
With suits of armour, monks and chivalry,  
With Dutch stained glass and golden antelopes  
Set on white-painted stairs by Chippendale,  
Ran headlong after all those 'last enchantments'

Here everything is 'after' something else

A chimneypiece from the tomb of John of Eltham,  
A screen from the gates of the choir at Rouen,  
A ceiling from the Queen's Dressing Room at Windsor,  
One from the side aisles of the Henry VII Chapel,  
A fine Adam fireplace in coloured marbles,  
Pinched from the tomb of Edward the Confessor

Outside, the 'Prior's Garden', where he wrote,  
And further off, his Chapel in the Woods.

An ecclesiastical fireplace (of his own design?)  
Was possibly his first attempt at Gothic.  
Restored: the Entrance and the Sanctuary,  
The Little Cloister. In the Gallery  
Are portraits (copies) of the ruined boy,  
Chatterton; Dryden; and Pope,  
Whose villa's only one bus stop away;  
Sir Robert – in one hand the Civil List.

The Gothic Library held two pink priests  
The day I visited; extremely clean  
And young and Irish in quiet-spokenness.  
High ceiling And the books  
Encased in soaring woodwork – but elsewhere  
The ceilings, all are low, most rooms are small.  
Contrariwise, the Waldegrave rooms are large.

As old as I am (47) he  
Dreamed up – and literally – the first  
Great *roman noir*.  
The bogusness of these surroundings still  
Could bring to life that first surrealist prose,  
Where a giant helmet kills the sickly son,  
A foot in armour fills a moonlit room,  
A giant's hand in armour haunts the stairs,  
A hundred knights bear an enormous sword,  
Three knights have one as spokesman for them all,  
A giant speaks out and throws the castle down.

Majestic symbols, Now the little villas  
Crowd round. The lawns no more run down  
Clear to the Thames, The gesture has been made –  
But what we make of it is up to us.

# *Pleasures of the Flesh (1966)*

## *Anti-poem*

A small talent, like a small penis,  
Should not be hidden lightly under a bushel,  
But shine in use, or exhibitionism

Otherwise, how should one know it was there?

Like the extant portions of Sappho  
These lines are fragments –  
An arm, a foot, dredged from the warm Aegean

They hint, nothing more, at other existences

If they were written out in boring fullness  
They would be as long as the lost plays of Euripides

## Money

My wife has only two pairs of knickers  
To bless herself with The curse of Eve  
Was always lack of clothes See the  
Frescoes in Italian churches, depicting  
The primal Pair in Eden's innocence

## Money

The children squall and fight on a wet, windy day,  
Diminutive pirates

## Money

At night comes home  
The sour-faced husband

Literature.

At the Royal Court and at the Arts: two 'modern' plays  
Set in the bogs, the waste land, old backyards:  
*My Old Man's a Dustbin* and  
*What A Way To Do Wee-Wee!*

Literature.

Little Red Riding Hood – grandmother to  
A small bed-wetting wolf.

Literature.

Critics. Blind dogs  
Leading the blind.

Literature.

A large proportion of letters to the Press  
Are written by lunatics.  
Lost poets, they sadistically pollute  
Reams of defenceless paper.

But what has all this to do with the Royal Family?

You may well ask!

## *Serious Matters*

A thin girl with an Earl's Court cleft  
Has promised me remission of my sins.  
I can't afford to die. My family need me.  
What would they do if I suddenly stopped earning?

That bowler-hatted major, his face is twitching,  
He's been in captivity too long.  
He needs a new war and a tank in the desert.

The fat legs of the typists are getting ready  
For the boys and the babies At the back of my mind  
An ant stands up and defies a steam-roller

## *Striptease*

They sit round us, hot from the Motor Show, these  
imagists  
They'll carry home a pack of coloured snaps  
To be fingered over when the wife is lying asleep  
The young pink nipples, not yet stained dark  
By maternity The small patch of fur  
That brings the eye down, makes long legs seem short,  
Disturbing the centre of gravity

The frantic metal music  
Slices our head-tops like a breakfast egg  
Young girls Old routine A business  
Like any other Everything shakes like a jelly  
Oral or phallic, here the law keeps us visual  
The eyes devour – but are soon satisfied  
After a time you can get very tired of chicken  
(Though they'll never believe that, back on the farm)

## *Wanting Out*

They're putting Man-Fix on my hair And through the  
window  
Comes a naked woman with a big whatnot Oops! I'm  
away  
To a country where the fantasies can be controlled  
Modestly I want to live, modestly Where the Herr  
Baron  
Takes an Eiswein from the cellar, cradles it gently  
In the tiny frozen hands of an echt Deutsch Mimi



Where the quiet roebuck surround the hunting lodge,  
Where the peasants, if they wanted, could shave with  
their hats.

Take me down to a Lustschloss in the year 1900,  
Give me tea on the lawn of a vicarage garden,  
Put me in a punt with all my little girl friends,  
Let the dreams grow into the leafy sex-books.  
I want a magnifying glass and a knowledge of Coptic  
And a box in the British Museum for the last  
performance of Hamlet.

## *S.F. (Vienna, 1901)*

I am at the height of my powers.  
My brain like a searchlight penetrates darkness  
And sometimes the whole landscape is lit  
By a blinding flash of unlooked-for insight.  
I have achieved considerable success  
As an interpreter of dreams.  
I have solved the riddle of the Sphinx.  
I am beginning to be recognized by my colleagues  
And I have written a book that shall stand unaltered  
For fifty years. The last word  
On a complicated subject.

I have overcome my fear of train journeys,  
My occasional dread of dying.  
I am free to travel and explore.  
My life is quiet (but the work is rewarding)  
And my wife and family exist in my love.  
My pleasures are simple. Wine, but no spirits.  
Twenty cigars a day An infrequent  
Visit to the opera – but Mozart only.  
In my opinion *The Magic Flute*  
Is not to be compared to *Don Giovanni* –  
The story is such rubbish.

Money is important And at last I have enough  
To devote myself to what I have to do  
Without the time-consuming chores that pay the rent  
I am ambitious, a pioneer, but contented

## *In and Out the Dusty Bluebells*

'In and out the dusty bluebells'  
A children's game, a singing dance,  
Rite of an urban Spring in wired-off playgrounds,  
Clear voices dancing over traffic sounds

'Tap-tap-tap on Someone's shoulder '  
With childish expectant menace  
The phrase stands up, and round it they all dance,  
An antic frieze of children, they advance

Into a sinister future, where no rhymes  
Hold up the threatening English sky,  
Where clouds no bigger than a man's dark hand  
Hold darker rain than they can understand

## *Short Time*

She jillets him from a window in Soho,  
A 'business girl' of twenty  
He is a florid businessman of fifty  
(Their business is soon done )

He, of a bright young man the sensual ghost,  
Still (in his mind) the gay seducer,  
Takes no account of thinned and greying hair,  
The red veins webbing a once-noble nose,  
The bushy eyebrows, wrinkles by the ears,  
Bad breath, the thickening corpulence,  
The faded, bloodshot eye.

This is his dream: that he is still attractive.

She, of a fashionable bosom proud,  
A hairstyle changing as the fashions change,  
Has still the ageless charm of being young,  
Fancies herself and knows that men are mugs.

Her dream: that she has foxed the bloody world.

When two illusions meet, let there not be a third  
Of the gentle hypocrite reader prone to think  
That he is wiser than these self-deceivers.

Such dreams are common. Readers have them too.

## *Tittle-tattle of an Emotional Dwarf*

### *Fantasy I*

I in my frigged and gold-laced fuckcoat,  
She in her tulle. I in my executioner's outfit,  
She in her naughty Victorian hoops.

### *Fantasy II*

A great critic lies stranded like a whale  
On caviare pebbles of a champagne sea.  
All literature round him shrieks and passes  
With the derisive defiant cry of a seagull.

### *Fantasy III*

The literary life A dishy young poet  
Talks to a very queer fish with a chip on his shoulder  
Butch Lesbians applaud

### *Fantasy IV*

In the evening we came to the land of No-Feeling  
Where not even the dripping Chinese tears  
Could wear away the stone, or Faith move mountains  
In the dark solitude we tethered our bric-a-brac  
By that never-to-be-forgotten shore

### *Fantasy V*

The office lies quiet like an old-fashioned battlefield  
With only the cleaners still scavenging for paper  
One thwarted, solitary telephone  
Rings with the message that will never be delivered  
But there is a time-bomb ticking in the basement

### *Fantasy VI*

The children are playing with the swings and the  
roundabout  
In a hot unbelievable summer  
When suddenly the sun explodes with disaster,  
Language dies, and the words  
Go dim for ever

## *Barbary*

I pace the Fourth Floor like a quarter deck,  
My windows square portholes on the sailing traffic,  
My executive suite littered with charts  
From raids on the surrounding country  
I bring back the new business  
Sailing close, close to the wind

I am surrounded by captured beauties,  
The sexy secretaries come mincing in,  
In it for the money.  
And this is also the Good Ship Venus  
Where fantasies are playing in the rigging  
Like St Elmo's Fire.

I shall have a memo sent to all the staff  
Prohibiting collections for those who leave  
To go to other agencies.  
I shall bank a good many thousands  
This year. I shall stop my ears  
When they fire an old copywriter from a cannon.  
After all, I am an alert, brisk trader –  
And everyone can recognize the Jolly Roger.

## *The Middle Years*

Between the pale young failure  
And the bloated purple success  
Lie the works on the life of the dahlia  
Or the shrewd financial guess.

Between the love and the yearnings  
And the fat indifference of age  
Lie the greatly increased earnings  
And the slick best-selling page.

Between the romantic lover  
And the sordid dirty old man  
Lies the fruitful wasted lifetime  
Of the years that also ran.

## *Dream of a Slave*

I want to be carried, heavily sedated,  
Into a waiting aircraft  
I want to collapse from nervous exhaustion  
I want to bow my head like Samson  
And bring down with me  
The ten top advertising agencies

I want to see the little bosses  
Vanish in the limelight like harmless fairies  
I want the pantomime to be over,  
The circus empty

I want what is real to establish itself,  
My children to prevail,  
To live happy ever after  
In this world that worships the preposterous

It is better to be a scribe  
Than hacking in the salt-mines,  
Heaving the building blocks  
Everybody wants to be a scribe

But I want out I want non-existence,  
A passive dream, a future for my children

## *The Back Streets of Fulham*

Nobody knows very much about  
The people who live in these rows of little houses  
They are mysterious There are some respectable  
criminals  
Some pay lip service Some are outright wild  
It is even suspected that witches are worshipped  
The women are up to their eyes in folklore

The wars start in the boredom.  
Like mushrooms growing in cellars  
They push up through the darkness, packed with  
violence.  
If anything were known, it would disgust the  
neighbours,  
The married women are genteel and may be neglected.  
A husband knows that if he were a Roman Emperor  
He could force a slave to suck him.  
You could torture him, and he would never admit it,  
For if such things were known, they would disgust the  
neighbours.

Nothing is known. It's all painted over  
With do-it-yourself and efficient repair work.  
When it cracks and the wars get out  
The 'small public for poetry'  
Is amused and disgusted.  
And, it may be, dead.

## 78s

First come the Twenties. The jogtrot rhythms  
Of the Savoy Orpheans; Paul Whiteman;  
Yearning saxophones, ragtime pianos. Jack Hylton;  
With the genteel slightly Cockney vocalists.  
Arrangements that close with a cowbell.

On the white body of the dog is lettered  
My mother's initial. These were nursery days  
For an over-shy, mother-fixated boy  
Proud of a snake-clasped belt.

An old music. The house is now pulled down.  
I know exactly where the scratches come  
In jazz that moves me like the poetry  
Of Pasolini (I have 'grown up' too).

And later, in my teens, I knew (and know)  
Where the unnatural breaks came in the symphonies  
Beginning with Beethoven I worked my way up  
At 78 (and 80) revolutions per minute

The speeds change, the nostalgia builds up  
Into a fury of neglected life  
Looking back, it all seems very simple

## *Climacteric*

When the love goes out of the act  
And the brightness out of the eye,  
When the thriller turns into a tract  
And the roaring bars run dry,  
When life is sage, and dull, and moral –  
That is the time to take up the quarrel

When the heat goes out of the sun  
And the colour out of the flower,  
When there's nothing new to be done  
And the kisses are turning sour,  
When good men's bones change into coral –  
That is the time to take up the quarrel

When the time runs out of the clock  
And the music stops in the band,  
When the crowing forsakes the cock  
In silence throughout the land,  
When the roses leave the mourning laurel –  
That is the time to take up the quarrel



# *Lepidoptera*

The butterflies are leaving.  
Brown and drab, they have it –  
Industrial melanism.  
The beauties are rare,  
Delicately sipping  
You sometimes see  
A Pot-Bellied Purple  
With a primping White Lady  
In a flower-banked  
Expense account restaurant.

The nettles are tidied away,  
Disturbing the life cycle.  
It's goodbye to the Red Director,  
The Diamond Duchess  
And *Meretrix superpicta*.

## *An Old Song*

For those who fancy themselves  
A big let-down is coming.  
It may be the work of the elves  
Or the Phantom Drummer drumming.  
But however it goes – it goes,  
The gorgeous eye, the nearly perfect nose.

There's a magic that works and works  
And charms away the talents,  
Like the infidel Terrible Turks  
That overthrow young gallants.  
Yes, however it goes – it goes,  
The mighty line, the dedicated prose.

The Loves and Cupids too  
Where the lovely bosom is heaving  
Find other work to do  
And cry 'We must be leaving'  
Still – however it goes – it goes,  
The girl in flower, the folded summer rose

## *A Secular Saint?*

Tell  
How his father taught him to shoot  
Rabbits straight from the shoulder  
How he went on the great Educational Pilgrimage,  
Suffered under Caesar and Cicero  
And was unjustly beaten  
How he underwent the terrifying boredom of war,  
The tantalizing sorrows of impotence  
When every girl was a mantrap  
Tell  
Of the five years' analysis in the wilderness,  
The marriage and the two children,  
The crowded flats in unfashionable districts,  
The continual spreading of The Word,  
The three books of poetry in the British Museum  
Tell  
How he was sacked in the takeover city,  
How he discovered Italy and a foolproof method  
Of killing time in North London,  
How his goodness was never recognized,  
How he died and was translated  
Tell

# *A Christmas Message*

In the few warm weeks  
before Christmas and the cold  
the Toy Department is organized like a factory floor.  
They're using epitaxial planar techniques  
in the labs. The toys are sold  
and there's rationalized packaging and at the hot core  
of the moving mass  
sweats a frost-powdered Father Christmas  
in a red dressing-gown and an off-white beard.  
What he wants most is a draught Bass.

On a dry Hellenic isthmus  
Zeus was a god who was equally hated and feared;

England is a Peloponnese  
and Father Christmas a poor old sod  
like any other, autochthonous. Who believes  
in the beard and the benevolence? Even in Greece  
or Rome there is only a bogus God  
for children under five. Those he loves, he deceives.

## *The Law Allows Cruel Experiments on Friendly Animals*

I don't feel very well. I'm the head of a rebellious  
Family, where everybody's shouting. Shall we ever find  
The particular island where we can all be happy?  
Put up the huts, shoot the goats, plant the corn.  
But I'm not Mr Fix-It, the Handyman Husband,  
I'm not forceful or even a Leader.

Youth is the happiest drunkenness Sober, we see  
The problems that, young, we never guessed at  
No longer drinking black champagne with blondes,  
Spinning with them the desert island discs,  
And bathing naked in the sparkling deep blue water

If I hit a child in anger I feel ashamed  
Weak kings are subject to flashes of temper,  
Ruled by their emotions So are strong ones  
We're in a test tube, say the theologians

Someone is watching His tremendous eye  
Glares at us, held up to the light  
We are a few decimals in a book

Nobody can get out, all our behaviour  
Goes down against a date and time of day

He'll publish his results – and maybe soon

## *Witchcraft*

Last night you were being ridden by a governess,  
A tall dark girl Her transparent blouse  
Showed the fat round nipples – all she wore

She rocked on your pintle like a rocking-horse winner,  
Squeezing so tight with elegant long thighs  
After five minutes, you began to change

There were sulphurous fumes Your sex curved inwards,  
Your bosoms began to slowly plump and swell,  
Your hair kaleidoscoped to new dispositions

At last, in your plump thighs she triumphed,  
With her new member and a hunting cry,  
Whipping you towards the Sunday papers.

## *The Good Money*

You were a success. You were pouring  
Out showers of gold in the Directors' Lavatory.  
Everybody smiled as you passed down the corridor.  
Rimbaud was left standing in his Gallic *conneries*.  
Lighting a Gauloise, you went into a meeting.  
Your voice was firm. The good money  
Rested smoothly on some upper-class vocables.

Never throw it after bad. When the crows' feet  
Walk round your eyes, ready to peck,  
You will need it. In that field you sowed  
Where the little voices come up fresh  
From the dark ground: children.

You will need it. Though dark birds  
Are pecking at the seeds  
You can buy them off. A scarecrow  
You may be. But the money keeps its virtue.

## *Warm to the Cuddly-toy Charm of a Koala Bear*

It's dull in the huge palace where I live  
The basement's stuffed with seduced handkerchiefs  
A global war would do, or a new revolution,  
To dissipate the gloom of early spring  
Everything's wet – but most the men and women –  
Outside, where the long rains drip from the trees

I'm lonely There's nobody here but me  
The vintages go round and round in my head,  
A merry-go-round I suppose I ought to call it  
Cobwebbed bottles and a thousand dirty glasses,  
One in my hand

Enthusiasm belongs *outside* – and mostly it's bogus  
I live in a mood, with a boozier's conk,  
I'm no Prince Charming,  
But I'm genuine, genuine, true to my dirty self

## *Crossing the Bar*

My ambition is to live to be eighty,  
To die quiet, surrounded by branded goods,  
In perfect harmony like Oxo and Katie,  
In a gamekeeper's cottage in the woods.

I want to drift towards my last Bournvita,  
My children happy and a room of books  
With their lined agony to make comfort sweeter,  
Remembering the girls and their good looks

I want all my employment to have been gainful,  
My life to be free of angst and nuclear war,  
And my last illness not to be terribly painful,  
As I float in towards that distant shore.

## *Spring*

As I went down the High Street, it was pouring out of  
me.

Got some Dad's Cuban Cookies at Victor Value,  
The children like them. The words began  
To arrange themselves in my head. I shall never be a  
warbler.

Big clots, I can't suffer them gladly.  
The pain and the words are like a sinus headache,  
Always waiting, in the background, to take over.

Send up a few hymns to Joy,  
I'm natural in my uplift. It's not all grey,  
There's more colour than Greene has ever dreamed of.  
Burying people in boxes is disgusting.  
The client from out of town has a telephone as  
heart-throb  
And his hand shakes as he begins to dial CUN 1234.

## *Secrets of the Alcove*

*Quand' ero paggio*

I must have been adorable (I was certainly stupid)  
The then Provost of King's  
Chased me down two flights of stairs at a party  
Nearly twenty years later  
A girl ran a hundred yards down a platform in Paris  
In high-heeled shoes to kiss me

All answered with a coldish heart

Who has not had their little successes?  
Inner absorption breaks into a rash of pride,  
Shows in the visible signs of bad behaviour  
I regret my calmness in the face of love,  
It bothers me like an unopened letter  
Returned to sender, that now will never be read

## *Disturbing Incident at the Recreation Ground*

Put in a lot of green This is a child's picture  
Draw in the swings and the top-hung roundabout  
The sun beaming in the upper left-hand corner  
Scene set? Right Now walk on a  
Scraggy-legged grey-haired female loony

Pushing a pram She moves bossy to the roundabout  
Hung with assorted children, varied age and sexes  
It stops She harangues my daughter  
Who blushes at being singled out, so public and for what?  
Keeping her feet on the ground, as I learn later,



While this hag is speaking. She collects two little girls.  
A grandmother or mad old auntie?  
Moving away they smile at me, abashed.  
She bashes, now, the baby. Hard strokes with hands  
For thumb-sucking or just for being a baby?

Draw in the baby (very small). To me  
She turns two glaring spectacles. I glare back.  
'You know!' she says. 'You know!'  
'I don't!' I shout, as hostile as I can,  
But she moves off in triumph. Well she may!

Her madness sparks a madness deep in me.  
I want to slam her like a tennis ball,  
Smash her My education tells me No.  
But I am full to bursting with a rage  
You'd find in textbooks. And it will not go.

## *The Dirtypot Decider*

In my mind there's a Dirtypot Decider.  
It comes from science fiction and the twenty-first century –  
If you feed in a plus it comes out a minus;  
When a digital computer really pulls its finger out  
You get something of the same effect.  
I use it on art and unsympathetic people,  
It's like crossing oneself when one passes a nun in the  
street.  
It combats black magic; it's a total negation.

It keeps me incommunicate and silent at meetings,  
Makes me a silent drinker and a laugher at nothings,  
Prevents me from joining in when the fun is other  
people's,

Gives me adventure stories to read, garbles fashion,  
Plays curious tricks with time, so I find myself saying  
'Do you remember the Beatles?  
But that was thirty years ago!' It's no respecter  
Of places either China already has India,  
Holiday resorts march backwards  
And the debts are crowding the seafront at Clacton  
Prophetic, really On art  
Its workings are never so certain  
It hasn't yet made up its mind  
About *Caro nome*

## *To the Virgins, to Make the Most of Time*

Now, listen  
I want you new girls, every morning,  
To sprinkle an oral contraceptive on your corn flakes  
I've got my eye on you, I want to marry into you,  
To fluffle you up a bit, then dive right in  
Smoothly

I'm a potentate Don't be too girlish,  
Don't bother to name those breasts Maria and Matilda  
Or call your favourite ball-point Clarence  
None of this interests me Wear a bra if you want to  
And panties if you want to It's immaterial

In this establishment, my will holds  
If you are naughty, there's a cane in the corner  
I don't believe in God, I can do what I like

Every morning there's naked bathing  
And then at least two hours of horse-back riding  
To promote a well-developed, rounded bottom

The only lessons are Theory and Practice;  
All my instructresses are big harsh Lesbians.  
So watch your step.

Night Duty begins at eight. A roster will be published.  
My favourite girls have a really marvellous time.  
I hope you will be happy here. Never forget  
These are the best years of your life.  
Go to your rooms now. Goodnight.

## *Zeg's Fire Stick Spits Tremendous Power . . .*

*('Now I am Emperor!')*

Hot stocking-tops! The frenzy of fat thighs!  
The feminine smells that batter perfumes down!  
The furry furbelows of pretty girls!

Male fantasies start at five, grow fierce at fifty.  
The air goes hard around the sexual objects,  
Shapes into the big attacking instruments.

The boys are brave and confidently shooting,  
Destroying all enemies with water pistols.  
From that destruction comes the later love,

Tender aggression of the animals,  
Love bites, nipped nipples; throbbing soft but hard  
The overriding urging of the gun.

## *After the Sex-bomb*

The soppy scruffy girls are coming  
They wade over the pavements, full of glottal stops,  
I am the last man in the world They want me  
Desires bloom like the flora in a huge vagina,  
Bacterial In those dark red depths  
Lie serfdom, nights in the sulphur mines

That bomb, they should never have dropped it  
We could see it coming for months – for years  
Perhaps an illiterate typist made a mistake in spelling,  
They were so anti-male they hardly cared,  
But now breaks loose a dangerous rank and file  
Rampantly female, disobeying directives

They smell me out From under my flat stone  
They harry me into the open, into the streets  
Where still, and cold, the poor male bodies lie  
(Under the larva guns a son died too)  
Hundreds are lynching me with their tongues  
They're closing in They won't take me alive

## *A Warning*

A little fat genius is sitting there,  
Small head, big belly  
A lot of brains under a little hair,  
His sex organs – smelly

That's the way it is with a genius,  
He's always a bit odd.  
He may have girl friends, grow zinnias,  
But he thinks he's a god.

Don't expect ordinary behaviour,  
Or a guide to morals.  
A genius is never a Saviour –  
He only looks to his laurels.

## *Tiger Rag*

Make way for Lord Cyril Connolly, Sir Gavin Ewart.  
Rein in that elephant. Track the sleek jungle beasts  
That make us sport in London's dense square miles.  
I'm a Native Prince, and interested in  
Miss Lust of Letchworth. My chocolate fingers hold  
Her future in my hands.

If literature were all, I might be rich.  
If all the poems were strung out like pearls  
I'd be a Maharajah in the sleep  
Of all the beauties in the typing pools.

It won't work. The ruby gleam in Guinness  
Is due to barley, so the copy says.  
What's precious fades under the office lights.

## War-time

A smooth bald head, a large white body  
No trace of pubic hair  
Raw, fretted and frayed by that rocky coast,  
The flesh where the nipples were

A woman drowned in war-time  
On the Ligurian shore  
An Italian shouted '*E una femmina!*'  
There seemed to be nothing more

A suicide? A Resistance girl  
From La Spezia floated down,  
A murderess from Genoa?  
The coast road into the town

Led me back to Livorno  
And a British Army tea  
The war got hold of the women,  
As it got hold of me

Twenty years later, in the offices,  
The typists tread out the wine,  
Pounding with sharp stiletto heels,  
Working a money mine

It's a milder war, but it is one,  
It's death by other means  
And I'm in the battle with them,  
The soft recruits in their teens

# *Eight Awful Animals*

## *1 The Dildo*

The Dildo is a big heavy cumbersome sort of bird,  
Supposed extinct for many years but its voice is often  
heard

Booming and blasting over the marshes and moors  
With the harsh note of Lesbos and the great outdoors.

The Dildo wears tweed skirts and Twenties

elastic-thighed knickers

And smokes black cheroots and still calls films 'the  
flickers'

It wears pork-pie hats and is really one of the boys,  
It has initiated many pretty girls into forbidden joys.

It has an eye-glass in one eye, and its bad-taste jokes are  
myriad,

Such as the one about Emily Bronte's Last Period,

And a good many others that are best left unsaid,

Buried in the old laughter, as the dead bury the dead.

The Dildo is quite frankly worshipped by some members  
of the community,

Who consider that even its name cannot be taken in vain  
with impunity

As it hops heavily about on its one wooden leg –

But most real Nature-lovers think it should be taken  
down a peg.

## *2 The Masturbon*

The Masturbon is a sort of dirty great elephant and it lives  
in a cave.

It's terribly keen on Do-It-Yourself, but it never bothers  
to shave.

It spends all its time reading ads and clipping the coupons  
out  
And addressing them to itself It knows what life's all  
about  
It has five spin-dryers and a twin-tub and a dream house  
and a Teasmade  
And a Special Offer beach ball, and a bucket and spade  
But it keeps them all at the top of a very high mountain  
A long way away, too far for checking or counting  
It reads the *Daily Express*, and nothing in its life is shared  
When it dreams, it dreams in French and often shouts  
'Merde!'  
At the sexiest parts of the dreams It is very close to God,  
Though its personal habits to you or me would seem  
unmentionable – or at least very odd

The Masturbon, I must tell you, is a perfect  
hermaphrodite  
It sleeps during the day and comes into its own at night  
It loves dirty photographs and paws them all over  
And it reads whole Police Stations-full of dirty books  
It's really in clover  
At a big swinging striptease The music and the tits  
Send it into ecstasies and mild epileptic fits  
In fact, like George the Fourth who was known as  
Georgy-Porgy,  
The Masturbon's life is one long delicious orgy

### 3 *The Panteebra*

The Panteebra rhymes with zebra and is a very slinky  
cockteaser,  
She goes round playing 'Let's do it' on a little transistor  
radio But if you try to seize her  
She will quickly vanish, leaving behind a very tantalizing  
smell  
That will stay on your clothes and make your wife  
suspect that all is not well



This animal is only female and her body is white  
With black stripes over teats and crotch. She comes out at  
night  
Like a girl in bra and pantees, to solicit married men  
And lure teenage boys into bestiality now and again.

Like other forms of life the Panteebra is quite  
parthenogenetic  
And goes round stirring up lust till the men become  
frenetic  
Then she quietly retires and lays a sex-mad baby.  
If you're unlucky you will see a Panteebra one day –  
maybe.

#### *4 The Fux*

The Fux lives in a dark hole with a bush at the mouth,  
In the Martin Season it always travels South.  
Its member has stood for Parliament several times  
And it goes about committing the most interesting sex  
crimes

Its tail is a small but efficient whip, used for flagellation,  
And it has written several short treatises on the Art of  
Fornication.

It is highly oral and it goes about licking people all over,  
Which is very beneficial and relaxing like the air of  
Folkestone or Dover.

The Fux works very hard manufacturing testosterone  
Which it guards as jealously as a dog with a bone  
Though it often gives it free to the very prettiest girls –  
In exchange for the usual and a snip from their hidden  
curls.

It lives in Earl's Court and Knightsbridge and drives fast  
cars  
And can be seen laughing its head off in the most  
expensive bars.

It wears no clothes except a big hairy false tail,  
And the female wears only foundation garments such as  
excite the male

In country districts it is quite well distributed  
And thick woods and high places to it are very suited

The Fux can never be hunted It's too far ahead of its  
time

Some day we may catch up with it, when we drag  
ourselves and the censors out of our primeval slime

### 5 *The Stuffalo*

The Stuffalo is full of the most tremendous energy –  
It was once very nearly tamed by an Indian called  
Bannerjee

It rushes frantically about in suburban streets,  
Bursts into the houses and sweeps the wives off their feet  
It is a greater rapist and seducer than the milkman or any  
commercial traveller,

When it sees an upright woman it is a great leveller  
It goes like a whirlwind through the semi-dets  
Coming straight to the point (it never sweet-talks or  
pets)

Unlike the fridge in the ads, it is *all* moving parts  
And it treats respectable housewives like a lot of old tarts

It would have knocked Boadicea right off her chariot,  
It 'betrays the trust of women' like Judas Iscariot,  
Paying no attention to their white gloves and elaborate  
hats

And their nylons and their cups of tea There's a strong  
smell of sprats

After it has passed through the lounge and laid them all  
low,

As they lie helpless and satisfied in the warmth of the  
Cosiglow

But afterwards, when they get around to adjusting their  
dress,  
They suddenly feel as though they couldn't care less.

## 6 *The Word-Bird*

The Word-Bird knows that everybody in Britain is  
frightened to death of *words*,  
So it flies up to a great height and drops them on people  
like turds.  
It always chooses large assemblies where all sexes are  
present  
And some of the words it lets fall are very far from  
pleasant  
To the Puritan ears they strike with a loud thud –  
And among the genteel (for this reason) its name has  
always been mud.

When the first four-letter words float down you should  
see the commuters quail,  
As it chants them confidently and firmly on a descending  
scale.  
They shake the Church and Chapel-going housewives to  
the tits  
And the policemen are rocked in their boots as each hot  
syllable hits  
And knocks their helmets sideways. Each Magistrate and  
Judge  
Looks as though he is choking in a sea of hot chocolate  
fudge,  
With bursting purple cheeks and a heart-pounding  
waistcoat  
And big bulging eyes like a lecherous old goat.

The Word-Bird eats dictionaries and any printed matter  
Sufficiently scarifying to make the crowds scatter –  
But it also has several medical terms up its sleeve  
And their effect on those who understand them you  
would scarcely believe,

Words that excite with a wild music, like 'penilingism'  
and 'cunnilingus',  
That pierce the brain like the disturbing notes of Charlie  
Parker or Charlie Mingus

And each night when the day is over the Word-Bird  
returns to the nest,  
And teaches its chickens a few more juicy dirty words  
before it retires to rest

### 7 *The Insex*

The Insex is like a large black beetle, it is a professional  
voyeur  
And a consummate actor and a most terrible liar  
It is coloured a very dark clerical grey, with a white  
collar,  
It is a prize creep and worships the Almighty Dollar  
On luxury liners at night it can often be seen in the  
rigging,  
Estimating the co-efficient of friction and the volume of  
the gin-swigging  
It is very well up in Debrett and knows how often the  
Queen Regnant,  
While actually sitting on the throne, has been made  
pregnant,  
It can sometimes be heard in the summer woods  
interfering with a minor  
It has written two plays called *The Amazing Dr Clitoris*  
and *Victoria Vagina*

The Insex has a frightening call like an air-raid siren,  
It hates all good poetry, but especially Byron  
It loves probing teenagers and telling them about their  
lives  
And explaining to husbands why they don't get on with  
their wives,  
In its time it has written a lot of articles for the *Sunday*  
*Express*

And it likes nothing better than obliging the *noblesse*.  
It lives in a little incense-burner's cottage by a cute  
wayside shrine,  
Offering up the sins of the world (including yours and  
mine).  
It has been sex-mad and bosom-crazy since the day of its  
birth.  
And this is the peculiar life of the Insex here on earth.

## 8 *The Spirokeet*

The Spirokeet is a terrifying brightly-coloured bird with  
a flesh-tearing beak,  
It spends a lot of time in the palm trees squawking and  
spouting Greek.  
It can curdle the blood-stream and shut teenagers up in  
clinics,  
It reads Ibsen in the original and its friends are all old  
cynics.  
It mocks unmarried mothers whose parts are absolutely  
brimming with VD  
And the effects of its attacks are not very nice to see.  
Its loud cry can be heard in the woods throughout the  
mating season,  
When the boys and girls get together for a very  
traditional reason.  
You may have only a second before finished the act of  
love,  
And you look up to see it chuckling, quite near, on a  
branch above.  
Once it gets its claws into your brain, you will probably  
go mad,  
And not be able to distinguish between the Good and the  
Bad.

Some say the Spirokeet is a moral bird, with an acute  
sense of Sin  
Others say it is a complete idiot and doesn't know where  
to begin

## *Office Friendships*

Eve is madly in love with Hugh  
And Hugh is keen on Jim  
Charles is in love with very few  
And few are in love with him

Myra sits typing notes of love  
With romantic pianist's fingers  
Dick turns his eyes to the heavens above  
Where Fran's divine perfume lingers

Nicky is rolling eyes and tits  
And flaunting her wiggly walk  
Everybody is thrilled to bits  
By Clive's suggestive talk

Sex suppressed will go berserk,  
But it keeps us all alive  
It's a wonderful change from wives and work  
And it ends at half past five

# *On Seeing a Priest Eating Veal*

*(A Sectarian Hymn)*

Put down that calf, thou Man of Flesh,  
Put down that veal, thou Bloody Man,  
God's creatures are the wheels that mesh,  
And He will eat *you*, when He can.

Unfrock thyself, thou Man of Blood,  
Thou art but meat, and so are these,  
And have been since before the Flood;  
Go down on thy unbasted knees

And ponder on Eternal Fires  
And battered fish and slaughtered lambs.  
Restrain thy animal Desires,  
Be cured – or God will smoke thy hams.

## *A Handful of People*

*1 Sandra*

What bosom tapped me on the shoulder?

Sandra.

What blooming beauty made me feel much older?

Sandra.

What sweet Italian English made me flinch,

Then made a man of me, yes every inch?

Sandra.

My eyes! Who dazzled them and pulled the wool over?

Sandra.

Whose nipped joys were born to swell a pullover?  
Sandra  
Who lives in stereo (and I in mono)?  
Who is the most beautiful Bondonno?  
Sandra

Queen of the bus queues! Saint of the dark glasses!  
Sandra  
Teetering on murderous heels, aloof she passes!  
Sandra  
Sweet poison, secret, venomous as Borgias,  
In young sophistication O how gorgeous!  
Sandra

## 2 *Weaslingham*

You can't get hold of Weaslingham He's slimy  
If he lived Stateside he'd be known as The Slimy Limey  
Let me put it on record, as firmly as (once) Thomas  
Edison  
He makes his living writing white lies about patent  
medicine  
The lies start black, and are discussed until they are grey  
They are usually off-white when they see the light of day  
  
But you couldn't make Weaslingham with anyone's  
scissors and paste,  
Because he's a double-dyed villain and at least  
triple-faced  
He's an absolute backslider and obsequious to the  
Directors,  
While to juniors and equals he's less kind than  
vivisectors  
In fact he spent years torturing his immediate inferior,  
Saying 'I've saved you from the sack' (he felt good, and  
superior)



Weaslingham started off being trained as a missionary  
In the far-off days before the world was nuclear or  
fissionary.

He could sidle into people's consciences in a way that  
would make you quite ill,  
You could swallow it all without guessing the bitterness  
of the pill.

I don't believe in Hell or the cauldrons that seethe and  
bubble,

But if there were such a place, Weaslingham would slip  
into it without the least trouble.

### *3 Jerzy*

Jerzy is an owl-faced Pole who needs very little  
headroom –

But he makes a lot of headway, particularly in a  
bedroom.

He was married to, but is now separated from, a  
charming person;

And all their relationship did was to steadily worsen.

For his wife had been married before and had a teenage  
daughter

And this daughter had a sixteen-year-old friend, like  
bricks and mortar

They were very close, and one night the friend stayed  
And slept like a sixteen-year-old in the spare bed.

Now Jerzy's wife was pregnant (of their second son)  
And it was obvious to Jerzy that if he wanted any fun  
He must get down into the basement where the chick was  
sleeping;

So down the stairs in his pyjamas he was stealthily  
creeping

With his thick-rimmed spectacles and an owl-like look  
Like a solid bird of prey in an illustrated bird book.

But Jerzy's wife slept badly, she was near her term,  
She woke up big and ponderous like a good-looking  
pachyderm

There was no sign of Jerzy or his sleeping head,  
He was after that teenager (as she afterwards repeatedly  
said)

AND AT THAT VERY MOMENT HE WAS TRYING TO GET  
INTO HER BED

There were two very loud and penetrating screams  
And now Jerzy realizes that teenagers are strictly for  
dreams

#### 4 Ian

It was on the hot dusty airfields of dry North Africa  
That I first met Ian, who should have been a white slave  
trafficker

He was full of tarting experience and when we landed at  
Napoli

He had scope to display his talents widely and happily  
We were both in the Artillery, and for tins of corned beef  
We could shoot any girl in sight It was beyond belief  
There were notices up saying *WARNING New Type of*  
*VD -*

You could buy more than you bargained for with your  
pounds of sugar and tea

Dark sluttish beauties, they carried all before them,  
Dirt outlining their bosoms where they wore them  
Bulging their ragged frocks, and over the beds  
Pictures of The Sacred Heart, above their olive heads

The priests were always giving them the old Red  
Warning

But there's a world of difference between Saturday Night  
and Sunday Morning

Ian went into Tanks and the Allied War Graves  
Commission,  
Jeeping about North Italy without any inhibition  
After the hot war. With a girl here and a girl there  
Just spread out waiting for the Capitano to appear.  
In 1946, demobilized, Ian went medical.  
His views on marriage were always fairly heretical.  
He examined the girl students. A heretic likes to choose.  
He converted a lot of nurses. He had very strong views.

When Ian had qualified he lived in Bayswater  
On the North side of Hyde Park where each erring  
daughter  
Stood to be picked up, a fallen woman. With a little soap  
and water  
He washed them in his room; he wasn't worried by  
delinquency.  
All he wanted was the satisfaction of their close  
propinquency.  
When Wolfenden came he signed on as a ship's doctor to  
Japan,  
To find out what the girls of the Far East could offer a  
man.

His praise of the Japs amounted to a paean.  
But since I've been married I've seen very little of Ian.

### 5 Ursula

Ursula came to England from Germany; a rather odd  
thing to do.  
In her late twenties, blondeish, blue eyes; average height,  
looks, IQ.  
Mousy and friendly, she worked in the same office as my  
wife  
And once, creeping up behind her, nearly frightened her  
out of her life  
By slapping her hard on the back. When my wife said  
'Ursula! Don't be such a bloody fool!'

She was seriously hurt She didn't know how to play it  
cool  
She had an Office Enemy, who finally got her the sack  
She was willing and efficient – I don't need to play it  
back,  
Everyone knows the crooked ways of Office Justice  
Which is probably most unfair where the most protocol  
and lust is

Ursula was a natural outsider who tried to come in from  
the cold  
She liked my wife, and bought a small toy St Bernard dog  
for my daughter, who was about a year old  
She took a few typing jobs, then decided for better or  
worse  
To go to a London hospital and train as a nurse  
All this time she had a boy friend who was a merchant  
seaman,  
Wouldn't marry her, and popped up from time to time  
like a pantomime demon

Ursula liked being a nurse She read the medical books  
(her character was serious)  
But the effect on her mind was mainly deleterious  
She developed some nurse-like techniques of abortion,  
and under her bed  
She kept in a bottle a small baby born dead,  
Pinched from the Maternity Ward She also began to  
worry  
That she was changing her sex (which can't be done in a  
hurry)  
And explained to my wife on the top of a bus how her  
clitoris was growing bigger,  
Which must have caused a lot of embarrassment or at  
least a faint snigger

But Ursula's medical career was cut short, because out of  
kindness one New Year's Eve  
She did someone else's duty at the hospital, and didn't  
leave

For home until one in the morning. A drunken car  
mounted the pavement  
In the deserted street; broke her back; and ended her  
earthly enslavement.

The moral of all this is: Never be accident-prone.  
But if by any chance I find myself alone  
In the nursery or (where the children have left it) in some  
other place  
With that little St Bernard dog, I can't look it in the face.

## Young

I'm a young giggle. Teenage. Sharp  
Claws and an undulating tail,  
Packaged in bright dreams of leather and teasing.  
I like to make the boys excited  
I love it when the cocks grow angry  
My pulse jumps to the razor-fighting.

Their hands have run over me like mice  
And I'm not mean, I let them have it.  
Books like *The Woman* promise something different  
But I can't spend my lifetime waiting.  
The things you miss, you never get again.

My Mum and Dad know one word: Steady.  
I'd rather mix it with a dozen boys,  
Ice cream in different flavours. No one  
Really wants vanilla all the time.

You split a coke, like on the telly,  
And the two straws suck up your lifetime.  
The sharing makes it quicker finished.

On your own you take the full flavour,  
Get the longer, as-advertised pleasure

I'll change when I change, but not before I do

## *Pi-Dog and Wish-Cat*

When Pi-Dog and Wish-Cat sat down for a meal,  
His and Hers on their bowls, there was a great deal  
For them both to pronounce on, deny and discuss  
Their words were all taped and have come down to us

Pi-Dog said he believed in a Man In The Sky  
Who would end the whole world in a flaming great fry  
Most delicious for dogs (who of course would be  
spared),  
And the bones of their enemies equally shared

Wish-Cat said, purring, how Love was the thing  
And was easily captured by using a ring,  
How Love would in rapture squeak louder than mice  
And live happy as dreams And wasn't it nice?

When the meal was all over they both wanted more –  
And Pi-Dog dragged Wish-Cat down onto the floor  
Pi-Dog bit hard and deep, and she clawed at his eyes  
Now they both of them sleep where it says HERE LIES

## *Variation on a Theme of K. Amis*

Sooner or later, most women poets  
Get locked in a lavatory with God.  
Quietly they knit their little poems,  
Receptive and contemplative and sad.

They are seldom raped by imagination  
Or highly excited or screaming for lovers  
Or drunk with the mad, leopard-spotted phrases;  
Domestic virtues fit them like loose covers.

Perhaps words come to women too easily,  
Pouring out regardless like coffee or tea  
Or like the uncritical fountains in Renaissance palaces?  
Nobody values what is given away free.

## *Diary of a Critic*

Had two poets for lunch. This afternoon  
Got my teeth into a fat biography.  
Went down quite well. I always try  
To taste the pages, savour line by line,  
Remember what Richards on a Cambridge blackboard  
Slyly wrote out in his peculiar spelling.

Reviewing dulls the palate.

'Placed' a few contemporary writers.  
Took Auden down a peg, moved up Lowell,  
Established a new End of Term Order,  
Prizes to Eliot Major, Betjeman Minor.

Several new scholarship boys are coming on  
Must be ready Never be left behind,  
A fuddy-duddy wound in a black gown

Beyond the pleasure principle No more enjoy  
Never get plastered on the fine new wine  
Mem The Meaning of Meaning Stand firm

### *Variation on a Theme of A. Huxley*

Some fat pigs are actually eating  
And do not hesitate to name the parts  
Rumps, breasts and legs It's revolting –  
And done in the name of Science and the Arts

They even describe the use of the instruments  
Knife, fork and spoon It's bad for the Nation,  
And can only lead to a terrible decadence  
When they write a forbidden word like mastication

See them revel in their beer and their beastliness,  
Egged on by sherry, the bit between their teeth,  
Ginned up for chambering and wantonness,  
As round a hot frilled leg they garter a parsley wreath



# *Manifesto*

I'm Old Brown, sitting in an oak tree,  
And all you little squirrels can bugger off.

As soon as I read the print-new poems  
Of Raul Quintela I knew I was marked out  
To be the ground plan of a giant palace,  
The not inconsiderable architect of a school,  
A prophet with honour in another country.

I take myself seriously. How can I not?  
My world like Milton's, the mind is its own place.  
I spin new silk under that mulberry tree  
That shall be worn by future generations.  
I chart my progress, ship and captain both,  
Down the unfriendly coast, a whole new world –  
Known by the names that *I* write on the map.

## *A War of Independence*

Run up the flag. Fire a shot across their bows.  
Pour the Coca-Cola into The Wash, get going  
On a Boston Tea Party in reverse.  
Or try a new Pearl Harbor: surprise attack.  
Tell them they're *all* no good.  
Frost, Crane, Cummings, Tate, Stevens, Ezra,  
Berryman, Lowell; and most no-good of all  
Walt Whitman (the faggot who burst into flame).

Make an honourable exception of Emily Dickinson –  
After all, she was a lady  
Tell them the greatest all-American poem  
Is 'Miniver Cheevy'.  
Get those fat-bummed Marines  
Across a barrel Make it clear  
An Independence Day is coming soon –  
The Union Jack for ever!

## *A Partly Smoked Cigar*

(Sleeve Note SAGA XIX 5216)

When the King offered you a partly smoked cigar  
You had to refuse Though the Queen  
Strongly urged you not to decline the honour  
You were a non-smoker Nobody was offended

So much for patronage Great corporations  
And agencies and potboilers pay the rent,  
Expense accounts allow a little boozing  
It's not the Court of Spain I'm not Rossini  
I wouldn't try to write a *Stabat Mater*  
There's probably nobody called Ferdinand  
In the whole of the Arts Council

Try me for pride That partly smoked cigar  
Is bitter smoking – down to the very end!

# *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters (1968)*

## ✓ *The Black Box*

As well as these poor poems  
I am writing some wonderful ones.  
They are all being filed separately,  
nobody sees them.

When I die they will be buried  
in a big black tin box.  
In fifty years' time  
they must be dug up,

for so my will provides.  
This is to confound the critics  
and teach everybody  
a valuable lesson.

# 1 The Life

## *Gentlemen v. Players*

They're playing Queer Croquet, Midget Cricket,  
High-Speed Golf  
The orange trees stand in tubs outside the tiny expensive  
mews houses  
Inside is so much taste the eyes feel sick  
Just what's their little game? There's money in it  
A fourth child, a third car, and Daddy gave her  
Two houses for a wedding present

I won't get in I'm Lazarus the Leper,  
Thrown out for poverty from their rich dives  
Where even the jazz has a high social tone

Back to the family, to keeping warm  
In a flat full of unfashionable love,  
To kisses ignorant of capital gains,  
And Africa stuffed with the liberal nightmares

## *Anniversary*

We must keep out the animals, they're getting on top of  
us  
Book a twable for twoo Often I'm wonderwing  
How the simple lispers commemowate their love

I can talk straight, my heart is stone-hard,  
My nose has the bloom and the colour of the grape.  
In my steel curtain of hostility

There are two little holes, no bigger  
Than a child could stop by inserting a finger.  
Kindness. I melt like a lolly

As six blue-green eyes keep the love standing.

## *Eternal Triangle*

My left foot! It's serious.  
It knows the ways of a man with a maid  
And how the ways of God are equally mysterious,  
It's outspoken and quite unafraid

My right foot is gay, and swerving  
After the pumping haunches; it will clench  
Its toes in ecstasy when the drinks are serving.  
It's frivolous and talks a little French.

Between my feet I live, so pulled both ways  
I can't walk straight, though straight is what I see.  
And to the end of my hard-walking days  
There'll be this trinity of my feet and me.

## *A Bad Moment*

I'm frightened I'm on a rock face and I can't climb  
I've got a toe-hold, just My fingers are failing  
Below me is a vast amount of nothing

In advertising a man of fifty is expendable  
The yawning sack holds economic murder  
And wives and children fill it with their clamor

A 22 bus goes whizzing past Home to a tea and towel  
The star Betelgeuse would hold so many million suns,  
The sun so many million earths I'm nothing but a  
nothing

June 1966

Lying flat in the bracken of Richmond Park  
while the legs and voices of my children pass  
seeking, seeking; I remember how on the  
13th of June of that simmering 1940  
I was conscripted into the East Surreys,  
and, more than a quarter of a century  
ago, when France had fallen,  
we practised concealment in this very bracken.  
The burnt stalks pricked through my denims.  
Hitler is now one of the antiques of History,  
I lurk like a monster in my hiding place.  
He didn't get me. If there were a God  
it would be only polite to thank him.

## √ *The Garden of the Clitorides*

In the walled garden of the Clitorides  
there's a paradise for middle-aged men  
where the teenage girls come when they're called  
and turn their eyes upwards in bitch-like adoration,  
so perfect in their beauty of sleek prize-winning animals  
it seems they never could die.

Perfect nakedness, perfect temperature, perfect idleness,  
these are the dreams of middle-aged men.  
Give or take some wines named by the gods.  
Give or take some sleep in the perfumes of women.

Outside the garden lies a city of satire  
peopled by parodies of garden behaviour –  
the teasing stripshows, the expensive drunk encores,  
the *noli me tangere* of vexatious virgins,  
the falling into disrepute and destruction

No one ever finds the gate to that garden



## *Venus in Furs*

There's a new opera called *I Masochisti*  
With words by Freud and music by Bellini.  
The first night's full of scented, furry women,  
You can't have them. The conductor's baton  
Puts an embargo on all base desires.  
Under gold lamé the big nipples swell  
Into crescendo. You're the muted horn  
That sings of knighthood in the foyer bar.

Bullish, a stalled industrialist. He has it made.  
His big bass voice comes straight up from his balls.  
Whipped by desires, you're the derided one.  
Nobody wants you, loves you, likes you.  
Such marvellous deprivation! Can it last?  
—

## *A Cup Too Low*

Put on some Mozart Then sit down and cry  
The world is very sad, and doesn't change.

Too many terrible people are people still  
It all looks bad, sounds bad; but don't be fooled,

It is bad Though some of what you wanted  
Perhaps you had The wishes grow like weeds

Hemming you in till you can't see the sky  
Or what is steadily flying out of range.



## *Venus in Furs*

There's a new opera called *I Masochisti*  
With words by Freud and music by Bellini.  
The first night's full of scented, furry women,  
You can't have them. The conductor's baton  
Puts an embargo on all base desires.  
Under gold lamé the big nipples swell  
Into crescendo. You're the muted horn  
That sings of knighthood in the foyer bar.

Bullish, a stalled industrialist. He has it made.  
His big bass voice comes straight up from his balls.  
Whipped by desires, you're the derided one.  
Nobody wants you, loves you, likes you.  
Such marvellous deprivation! Can it last?

## *A Cup Too Low*

It's everything, not just the mind, that's ill  
Perhaps if all experience were pooled

The house of life would not be quite so haunted?  
And happinesses grow from these sick seeds?

## *Nameless*

There's something in my bed, with two feet,  
two legs, a body and two arms  
It also has hands, but it is faceless  
It never seems to have heard of sex  
Of course it has a head Is it a person?

Nobody knows what goes on inside it,  
whether it has organs or just a shell,  
you can't get through to know if it's thinking  
I guess that it is very, very old  
and that its blood is equally ancient

It never moves much Sometimes it frightens me,  
it's too obscure to be parsed like a language  
Mostly it lies there, breathing a little,  
full, I imagine, of some odd significance  
Whatever it is, it ought to have a meaning

# *The Muse*

A boy was kissing me left right and centre  
But something nasty crept into his quatrains.  
I left for thirty years. I haven't changed  
Though he's grey at the edges. Now I'm back  
We live together in uneasy joy.

My lovely mouth; his bitter, tainted kiss  
On sufferance like an old and worn-out husband.  
The boys are waving in the other bar,  
I swing my skirts and go. A long goodbye  
To all who woo me when they're past their prime.

## *Beginnings*

In the vast anthecap of the world  
one little ant thinks differently.

In the snarled traffic of metropolis  
a small family car crashes the lights.

Under a tufored and conventional suit  
a heart beats out a naked rhythm

## *Prisoner of Love*

Across the green carpet moves a hamster  
shaped like a racing car in cream-coloured fur  
The heart moves so, for all small animals  
Alone in a room it certainly never made  
its ears are tender Hamsters have problems too  
My fingers are its god, to scoop it up,  
give it the freedom of that dark green sea,  
return it to its cage Food and drink  
come from above, for sharpening teeth  
the ritual gnawing of the metal bars  
Eating the corner of a record sleeve  
is sin Punishment is withheld  
Even a hamster is a child of light

## *So Far*

Through the dusk come the hot potato men  
and the Streatham Strangler  
There's gaslight I'm cosy  
Though all the starving cats in Latin countries  
would fill Hyde Park,  
a family kitten sleeps beside the fire

In every room before sledgehammers slam  
hundreds of people have lived  
It's such a cliché  
The children cut their devils out of paper,  
love/hate their parents,  
the past supports me like an easy chair

So far we have come through life, so far.  
In a bland ignorance  
the young are happy.  
The shadows on the wall, art for art's sake,  
comfort, protect us.  
I must be marvellous, to have such thoughts.

## *In a Block of Flats*

The summer suns a threadbare lawn  
And fills the Court with dryness,  
Where children just a few years born  
Are learning about shyness,  
Where the imaginary unicorn  
Looks round for vanished highness

Only to find that gayer girls  
Ignore the Middle Ages  
And sigh for medieval curls  
Not on the heads of pages  
Or on the shoulders of gross earls  
But on the tops of mages

Who contemplate a swinging scene  
And love the swinging city,  
Young men that hate the might-have-been  
And think the past a pity,  
As admirably tall and lean  
As unicorns are pretty.

## *Businesslike*

On a big office block is a monolithic smile  
That never changes  
It smiles at inequalities of income,  
At old political injustices

A client may seem like a red plush teddy bear  
Or a red devil  
His voice may come out as a shout or a scream  
But yours must always be level

If it's digging your grave quick with a knife and fork  
Or drowning in wine,  
The business lunches will help you no end –  
That smile is in no way divine

## *A Mystery?*

*28 February, 1966*

The clerical drone  
In honour of an uncle, weak flesh, enduring bone  
'And we shall all be changed, in the twinkling of an eye'  
As the seed into wheat, chrysalis into butterfly

I nod, and hibernate,  
Asleep from long habit; past the churchyard gate  
Surges main road traffic, the coffin is wheeled out,  
We stand by the raw grave, I with my honest doubt



At the last words  
There are no thunderclaps, no omens from the birds,  
But, settling on the parson's gown, one Small  
Tortoiseshell,  
Deluded and untimely, woken by the warm spell.

## *Daddyo*

My hearing deadens. My eyes  
aren't good in artificial light.  
The memory wobbles. But  
that's enough of that.

So clearly I remember  
what a harsh crass old man  
my father seemed  
thirty years ago.

But he was the bright boy  
from Edinburgh, the medico who won  
hundreds of pounds of weighty scholarships.  
A big attacking surgeon.

My mind shrank under the barking knife.

Now it's my turn  
to be the red-faced fool  
that sons hate, tittered at  
by sneering miniskirts.

It's strange to wear  
a dead man's shoes, to know  
exactly where  
each one pinches.

# *The Real and Unreal*

In my son's mind  
the Mexicans are fighting the Texicans  
and there are drawings to prove it,  
the Martians eat Mars bars  
A life no one can share

Always I find  
the words confounded with the antiwords,  
a bloc the mind can't move it  
There are battles, but no scars,  
nobody dies there

His war, unkind  
to no one, kills but doesn't really kill  
the dead rise to disprove it  
and drive away in cars  
Killing would be unfair

## *Some Second Ghest to Entertain?*

In London's twin beds, where everyone's re-marrying,  
lie some pertinent questions and some genuine  
arguments  
and the desire for change when everything's not  
satisfactory  
He has his eye on an increasing waistline  
She is in mourning for a youth of loves

To change! To change! The dream at every window  
persists through months of nights boring as Sundays

The wetness of the drinks is an oasis  
in a broad calm that is also arid.  
Begin a log book of the old emotions

and you will find they all come round again.  
Plot them on a graph whose peaks are children.  
I'm out of such a world. Too old for changing  
; I hold to humdrum love – and I have promised  
; never to murder my wife, and never to leave her.

## *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters*

Through the rain forests, up a long river,  
over greensand and clay and red earth,  
they toil like ants in their long procession,  
hacking at difficulties that grow and close again,  
covering once more the path behind them.

Following these unimportant carriers of the  
unimportant,  
we seldom see them. When we do, they grin.  
After the bad patches they turn with a kind of smirk  
and beckon us. There are large animals too  
that rustle through the hemispheres.

Travelling over chalk to a familiar sea  
is all we dream of where the trees are strangled  
by the great sneering creepers. Sunlit birds  
yakkety yak above our own deep gloom,  
hundreds of feet over our inadequate heads.

How did they do it? We see the marks on trees  
but made by what? teeth, weapons, little axes?  
They don't communicate except to grin  
We know they're there but jungles grow so fast  
and all we have are bruised and bleeding hands

## 2 The Cryptics

### *Lines*

The other day I was loving a sweet little  
fruitpie-and-cream

He was flying an Avro Manhattan into a beady-eyed  
silence

✓ His little shoes were shining as he stood by the sea-lions

Panting, she lifted her skirt in a classical gesture

/ The darkness came on like an illness while we were  
debating

✓ The albatross yawed to the masthead,  
Coleridge-fashion

The seven dwarfs were singing these mystical motifs

# *Lifelines*

In the rat race he won by a whisker.

Bitching and bitching in the double bed.

- - She came unexpectedly, while he was standing waiting.

A voice from a jar of vaseline: 'This too is love.'

A girl like a cat sits in the window of The Sizzling Sausage.

- - In the great cities the ants are actuarians.

The lips of the Muse have the taste of beauty.

In a field of alien corn a girl was reaped.

## *The Great Lines*

For bad men do what good men only dream.

The beauties warble down the tracks of time.

What could console is working like a watch.

After the banquet: 'Shall we join the dead?'

From the wild lands the precious food of cities.

- A dream of adultery: two for the price of one.

- Even the wolves, at last, will go away.

## *Hands*

With her short squat (and greedy) hands she seized  
power

Yesterday he set his hand and seal  
to his final arrangements for frying Boy Scouts

Meretricious Mayfair hands were bathing the  
Birmingham balls

He wants God to lean down with an enormous hand  
and slap on his back a label that says SATISFACTORY

Above the wine-shop her hands enticed him

The writing hand was wobbling over the paper

## *Hymn*

The names are written on the heart,  
and, as one dies, which is the last name? Whose?

Tchaikowsky, with his brass, bats on towards  
his nineteenth nervous breakdown

There are islands (far and few)  
where all the villagers have absolute pitch

Such heavenly choirs are all concerned with Love,  
and Venus is muscular (ischioavernosus)

# *Falls*

After a sloshing great lunch she fell over backwards.

In the towering city there was defenestration.

Wind-warped, one parachute failed to open.

His mood fell like mercury when she left him.

In her cups her breasts fell softly.

In the place of the pins you could hear a leaf drop.

# *Objects*

A sadistic whiskyglass belonging to my father,  
a hanged man patterned: 'The Last Drop'.

A letter from my mother mentioning a General Election:  
'I tremble for the rest of the country.'

A blue dressing gown that my wife spends time in;  
quilted and somnolent like a walking bedspread.

A plasticine stegosaurus fingered by my son;  
vegetarian fool with a wooden tray for pasture.

A troll with a Beatle haircut attempted by my daughter.  
Folkloristic grinning in the nursery.

## *Classical Disasters*

The brazen bull was filled with his bellowing

The wax was melting as the wings climbed higher

✓ At the big banquet the food was human

The greedy cloth bit at his muscular body

He clubbed the old man at the lonely crossroads

They cut the tongue from her squealing struggles

At the last strained heave the stone toppled backwards

## *Lines of History*

By a deserted road the Apostles were peeing

The sun through the burning-glass tickled the warm hay

✓ The sea heaved with its burden of whales

✓ The antheap was teeming with cries of injustice

Above the wineshop she cupped her hands and held him

Past the window of the torture chamber flew the pigeons

There was no silence, now or at any time



## Gnomes

The ten-year-old who dreams of being Miss World  
has a face like a pig with toothache.

The spotted pages romantically admire  
the quims of queens.

Never forget the civilized meanness,  
the smelly bums and cheesy feet.

The respectable citizen longs to murder  
a few good criminals.

You, in a world alive with snerges,  
be careful when you walk on pavements.

## Couples

The little married hands. The pinky nipples  
Soft as a hamster's shyly twitching nose.

An unromantic man bursts in and shouts:  
'Hot jissom! I'm a Touareg!'

Behind the bushes there is country dancing.  
Full many a jig, horned heads, archaic flutes.

Upstairs Mr Goldberg has his secretary over a desk,  
Her panties round her ankles.

## *Fifteen Days in a Banana Skin*

The first week still unripe and reading Henty  
And in the second week the wars came true

On to High Art, High Art and disillusion  
The cryptic words took shape upon the wall

Love ripened on the tree, the fall of Eve  
Some seed was scattered on a city pavement

The years of sweetness in a spotted skin  
A bunch of college boys exposed for sale

What's eating you? Lips that are feminine  
Lips that can well ingest a golden beauty

## *Existences*

Living at Potato Point, and dying of Dog's Disease

Living in The Blue Desert, and dying of inertia

Alive in Quick City, and fading with the trendsetters

## *The Statements*

Arts are actually anthropomorphic  
Business is often bilaterally baleful  
Causality is a considerable cow  
Desires are delightful as well as desperate

Energy in everything is everlasting.  
Freedom is frequently fairly fallacious.  
Growing girls go gay with gallantry.  
History has some horrible hermits.  
Illness is injurious only to idiots.  
Jokes are jealous and jazz is jolly.  
Kitchens are kinetic like kisses and kiwis.  
Love is laudable and lately laundered.  
Matrimony is mainly merry and miserable.  
Names are numinous and never negligible.  
Officers often open their orifices.  
Palaeontology is particularly painful.  
Quails are queer but quiet and queenly.  
Restless rovers are rarely repentant.  
Soles slide sideways in silent seas.  
Terrible tornadoes torture the terrain.  
Under umbrellas the uncles take umbrage.  
Various virgins veer into vinegar  
Weary wallflowers wait wetly for wisdom.  
Xylophones excel in extemporization.  
Yelling in youth is yesterday's yawning.  
Zen is as zealous as zebras and zinc.

## *The Headlines*

No dice, as Rasputin flies in to floozies  
Mean famine tempts 5 bits from Queen  
Profs flee as city falls to Turks  
Agitator executed on funereal hill  
Limeys and krauts combine to flog the frogs  
Sage corrupts youth, say City Fathers

Too much water spoils the tea  
Norman Archer catches Harold's eye  
Demagogue roasts books, heebs  
Daughters claim Pop unfit to rule  
Allies victorious, fry Troy by stratagem

## *The Eight Suits*

A lightweight suit from Austin Reed,  
good for the evil act

A suit of black silk pyjamas,  
flavoured with decadence

A track suit bursting with muscle,  
vitality breaks the tape

A suit of hairy tweed, alert  
to publish snobberies

A business suit full of smooth words,  
charcoal for the grill

A diver's suit for old oceans,  
fish are its spectators

An evening suit dark as nighttime,  
the mourner at the feast

A white protective suit of science,  
at home among the poisons

# *The Twelve Slogans*

Override the underwear with Penetro

Keep above bard with Shakespeare Shoes

Dig the decalogue with Dean Dubrovnik

Be baroque with J. S. Bach

Plug in to the Passover for peculiar parties

Let Love lighten your liaisons

Populo promotes political people

Go gay with new bright Girlie

Make your member mad with Mysticism

Increase your stature with new Buskino

Smarten up with Smattering

Learn to live and lay off literature

she shouting pigshit on the american books  
he drown in the glass of a dry martini  
one canny pig runs down the lane of lingos

a purple splurge is coming, cut it out  
on all the sibilant seas the words are walking  
no trust a woman, she split down the middle

a spear of light the black fogs of the brain  
under umbrellas twirls a memory boy  
go home go home the flatness of the dust

## *All Brave Men are Slightly Stupid*

At the fart of a gourmet several ladies fainted

At the sigh of a saint the postulants passed away

At the wriggling of Venus no man was a worm

At the end of the conference the table was talking

At the sight of the sea the dressed crab was disrobing

At the sizzling of bacon the pig was perturbed

At the cry of the cannon the soldiers were shouting

### 3 The Others

#### *Magic*

An old man with his sary lume  
And the drugs of the future  
May be led to lodge with the light-wit ladies,  
Reclining royally.

Wonderful when a wlonk beckons  
In array that is seemly  
And all are swimming in the swan-white wine,  
Lustfully lapping!

Though we were yeild yesterday,  
Like a riotous ratbag  
Now are we loosely light-heartedly laughing,  
Portentous potentates.

#### *A New Poet Arrives*

A new man flies in from Manchester.  
Frank Frittlewood.  
Death to the Public Schools,  
Ready to piss in the eye of the Old Universities.

A big woolly striped scarf round his neck,  
The hunched antagonism of a left wing student.  
How right he is!  
Through immense spectacles he sees clearly

That only a New Movement can save our souls  
Wordsworth's great beak was pecking at that apple  
The tree of knowledge,  
Dividing line between the past and future

Take off those vestments, and those vested interests  
Show as a naked soul You must admit  
He's onto something  
Change, in the Arts, is nearly always good

## *Arithmetic*

I'm 11 And I don't really know  
my Two Times Table Teacher says it's disgraceful  
But even if I had the time, I feel too tired  
Ron's 5, Samantha's 3, Carole's 18 months,  
and then there's Baby I do what's required

Mum's working Dad's away And so  
I dress them, give them breakfast Mrs Russell  
moves in, and I take Ron to school  
Miss Eames calls me an old-fashioned word Duncce  
Doreen Maloney says I'm a fool

After tea, to the Rec Pram-pushing's slow  
but on fine days it's a good place, full  
of larky boys When 6 shows on the clock  
I put the kids to bed I'm free for once  
At about 7 – Mum's key in the lock



# *The Paling of the Clerds*

*(for Bruce Broadstairs)*

He never saw the paling of the clerds.  
Somebody kneed him in the bolls,  
He straggled herd, a rising son, went dawn.  
A musked men knafed him in the rippling beck.  
Such vehelence! The blod ren every way.  
He stoggered, lick an ecks they broke his skill  
And sore he lay a-daying all the nate.

Thin fur his greve they tippled a huge stein.  
Wrought on it: TUCK HIM IN ERL AND ERL  
HE WAS A MIN. End their the big bland see  
Kipped keening dewly on the rising cost,  
His lafe was spant. A less! Oh sod  
To no thet promise never march filfulled!  
The sturm brust from the paling of the clerds.

## *Nymphs and Satyrs*

*(for 'Filthy' Prior)*

The satyr's mouth is stained red with wine,  
The nymph is beautifully white.  
The nymph is resisting – all very fine –  
The satyr is slightly tight.

But it isn't exactly as you think  
For here's a remarkable matter:  
The inside of the nymph is as wet and pink  
As the lustful lips of the satyr.

## *Office Primitive*

Me likum girlum Hatum work  
Smokum Drinkum Strokum pussy  
Go bus every day Lovum stockings  
Boss say workum faster faster faster  
Childer school work faster faster  
Wife home work mucher mucher mucher  
Me workum daydream slow  
Get pounds get big get fat  
But always thinkum stockings

Likum bester rum  
Rum bester bottle  
Me dreamum top dreams  
Me dreamum girlum under  
Me lovum skyman?  
Me love me me only

## *A Woman's World*

I'm being raped by an apeman  
when the egg-timer pings in the kitchen,  
the excited kettle comes in steam

My lover has blue scales instead of skin,  
I grind against him like cheese under a grater  
There are birds seven feet high,  
I ride them down the motorways  
All gooey with blood, and fighting  
I am an Empress, pop from the beds  
of the warm soldiers like toast from the machine

It's red-hot buggery for the cheeky secretaries  
my husband plays with.

## *Disciple*

All His beliefs I share.  
The Jews are getting uppity. The Banks must go.  
The Russian Novel's not significant.  
His Christ-like sufferings I catalogue,  
The years of captivity,  
The charge of treason.

And I admire his old-world courtesy,  
His struggles to take his hat off to a lady,  
With one arm full of books,  
His unselfishness and consideration –  
As when, in a concourse of bores,  
He turns pathetically to me and asks:  
'How much more of this must I listen to?'  
In a low voice.

He's old and very special.  
By my discipleship I'm special too.

## *A Guttural Frigment*

Contstrock in bordlond, at the meal with slavs  
Whon will the cot ond mous be reconciled?  
A woorld we wish! no keeling, on the sond  
No stip of horsh mororder; inversion non  
Bot blonk the sea ond onpertorbed the sky  
In peace thot longthins so onfinished out

Fishcake palaver! Woorlds are not so culm  
Voiolence laps oopon the tittering  
Gulls as the say lofts op its creamy skorts  
Stobbing ond stobbing to the poolsing hurt  
Moch morder feels the flot ond nukid lond  
Sailence was never, now or ony teem

Geeve us som sleep, som end to rostlessness,  
Som quiet in the ercherd of oor lov  
Onder the epples thot oor purenks knew  
Lit us bee Odom ond receiving Eve,  
No sorpent in the plosky greening gross,  
A sommer's day by ony gloaming loch

## *A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of Edgar Mittelholzer*

An agony greater than I like to think of

You poured petrol over yourself and put a match to it  
You went out in a blaze of glory  
(But already in the writer that fire was dead?)

You will be a powerful jumbie,  
At midnight every 5th of May  
Let the marauding minis of Farnham beware.

A gaunt West Indian ghost  
Flaming with strangeness, with madness in the head  
Magic fire on the brain, lighting the woodland.

Your strongest urges to destruction  
Turned at last on you.  
You lived in a cage with a tiger  
For years before you put a foot wrong.

## *Love Song*

You've got nice knees.  
Your black shoes shine like taxis.  
You are the opposite of  
all farting and foulness.  
Your exciting hair  
is like a special moss,  
on your chest are two soft medals  
like pink half-crowns under your dress.  
Your smell is far beyond  
the perfumes at parties,  
your eyes nail me  
on a cross of waiting. Hard is  
the way of the worshipper.  
But the heart line on my hand  
foretold you;  
in your army of lovers  
I am a private soldier.

## *Georgic*

His verse is accomplished and formal,  
It's never been boring or flat  
His mind doesn't seem to be normal  
But he's perfectly pleased about that

It's just what's going on that's so puzzling  
In these nightmares of death and disease,  
There's a hellhound around that needs muzzling –  
And a Gothic Pre-Raphaelite tease

Like an elegant dandified Borgia  
He offers a bright poisoned cup  
And smiles – just a bit – at our torture  
Until we confess we give up

He's the dark one who handles the riddles,  
He's ill-met in an intricate maze,  
Quite content if we burn while he fiddles  
With a bland and benevolent gaze

## *Short Story*

She bit his love-nuts, what a nasty girl!

Her two were always going before her  
a perfect pair, so softly supported

They met in a bar and he was explaining  
how 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' is about pubic hair  
and how the clitoris is only really  
the little boy who lived down the lane

Stand in front of the mirror and let me lick you.

It was hot on the beach. Too many bikinis  
and several hangovers were stretched out in the sun.

They drank a very cold white wine. It  
was a great life. After a big lunch  
they rolled about on a 42 sq. ft bed.  
Some sand grated into their copulations.

There's a whole literature of the Mediterranean.

He and she and a sea that is tideless  
and peaches that ought to be wearing frilly panties.

He was called Jan and she was called Paula.  
The Loves were laughing when they got together,  
they parted with a shrill cry and a strong backhand  
that reddened with a line her bloated floaters.

## *One for the Anthologies*

Herbert's a hard and horrid man  
And so am I.  
He does as much harm as he can  
And so do I.  
He wastes the time of Institutes  
And spends his nights with prostitutes,  
And so do I.

Wilfred's a weak and weary man  
And so am I.  
He's always been an also-ran  
And so have I.

He's been defeated all his life,  
Too tired to end it with a knife –  
And so am I

David's a dense and drunken man  
And so am I  
He's fond of glass and mug and can  
And so am I  
When these sad dogs have had their day  
They'll all be glad to go away  
And so will I

## *The Legend of the Lustful Lozenges*

I'm busy collecting material for a new long poem  
(so many novels have used up so many people)  
This one is about a little drinking duck  
like the one the *Daily Express* found on Guy Burgess's  
mantelpiece  
dipping its beak forever into a glass of forgetfulness

This duck is in love with a bird that proves unfaithful,  
*Donna sleal!* it cries *La bella del Re!*  
It is overcome with a sense of dishonour  
and plunges into a carafe of red wine,  
Italian-style, a beak that is sharpened by bitterness

This duck (which you might not have thought) is a tenor  
and it lives under the weight of an English winter,  
oppressed by sleeplessness and the love that consumes it  
It is fairly happy in its work, which is also its life, which  
is dipping its beak into some life-giving liquid

Its loved one has migrated with another mate  
and is busy laying eggs, but the duck keeps drinking,



its hours are not fixed like an office worker's,  
through the cold dark night it is sipping and sipping,  
swinging its head back, then down to the wetness

which is the only fluid in a large dry room.  
Its task is as dull as machines in a factory.  
Only in between sips can it shout its revolted  
awareness that a beauty has left it forever.  
If it slept it would dream of lustful lozenges

promising re-unions and billing and cooing  
and some quite different and perfect existence.  
But all it can do is move its head forwards  
and backwards; all it knows is drinking  
and the cold of a deserted, disappointed winter.

## *Xmas for the Boys*

A clockwork skating Wordsworth on the ice,  
An automatic sermonizing Donne,  
A brawling Marlowe shaking out the dice,  
A male but metaphysical Thom Gunn.  
Get them all now – the latest greatest set  
Of all the Poets, dry to sopping wet.

A mad, ferocious, disappointed Swift  
Being beaten by a servant in the dark.  
Eliot going up to Heaven in a lift,  
Shelley going overboard, just for a lark.  
Although the tempo and the talent varies  
Now is the time to order the whole series.

An electronic Milton, blind as a bat,  
A blood-spitting consumptive Keats,  
Tennyson calmly raising a tall hat,  
Swinburne being whipped in certain dark back streets.

All working models, correct from head to toe –  
But Shakespeare's extra, as you ought to know

## *Thriller*

I drove the hearse back at 70 m p h

My worries flew away, a flock of black birds  
Some shots of rye and on to see Diane  
Complete release Her legs locked round my back

But that night wasn't so easy –  
there's nothing easy about any money –  
I mailed the ransom note and marked the tree

For two more nights the fuzz was circling badly  
Killing the headlights From my hide I saw  
a fat pockmarked man, with the binocs

As in the wood he brutishly waited, freezing,  
I thought of shallow graves and how the boy  
had cried all night about a teddy bear

But finally I did it with a cushion  
and half a bottle of Scotch Buried him too  
My nerves were bad, the hearse was catching up

At last the tin box with the elastic band,  
nobody there but me And if the notes were known?  
Diane was threshing about, mad at my failure

Isn't it marvellous how it all turns sour?  
Money to burn and burning's all it's fit for,  
and down the long black road I drive the hearse

# *The Gavin Ewart Show* (1971)

## *The Day of the Creator*

After a first-rate breakfast I sit in my shirtsleeves  
and begin work on my new long poem 'Yelling for  
Elsbeth'.

It's a complicated story full of repetitions,  
about a scattering, a dispersion, a diaspora.  
It's a love story too and my writing grows curly  
as it lingers over the details of that seduction  
in the dark bean swamp. Outside my window  
the birds are singing a page out of *Livy*.

Only one could climb the mountain, that is the essence.  
The rest were led aside by trolls, their legs jerked like  
billy-o

as they sank in the viscous mud by the pathside.  
I feel I am being split down the middle by an axe  
and down the fissure runs the telltale of narrative,  
in not too long I shall be as famous as a novelist,  
sign copies in bookshops. Down in the garden  
a cat is playing god to several sparrows.

I go into the kitchen for a cup of instant coffee,  
not too much sugar because of my waistline.  
In the cheroot smoke I sort out some characters.  
Jacqueline must be like H, and the tall Rabbi  
must tell the truth about life to Adrian Semester.  
Will Fontainebleau make it? The sugar lumps ponder,  
white in blue cardboard. All things are thinkers,  
and an ant zigs quietly over the windowsill.

So undisturbed, though I deal with disturbances!  
I really have created the pen and the paper  
To the nastiest characters I assign action,  
the nice ones sit still in a quiet contemplation  
What colours shall they wear? Would a dialect comic  
destroy the whole effect of the nineteenth Canto?  
Or improve it? Or what? It's my typewriter  
that glints so much knowledge of communication

Though I write so many words, one thing is certain  
Nobody will shout 'Christ!' at a critical juncture,  
there will be no obscenity of thought or deed or even  
any long mention of anyone's knickers  
There's a great deal of morality in quietness  
and a pure style belongs to a clear sunny morning  
and the myth I am holding Ever so gently  
a little white cloud floats over the treetops

At the lawnmower's purr I stop for a moment  
Would Alaric do anything truly despicable?  
Yet when that mean action flowed out of my biro  
it seemed somehow so right, so *natural*  
Soon I shall have lunch, then a walk on the Common  
Any sort of exercise is good for my diction  
and always has been That rough dog barking  
is like a caesura in my line of neatness

## *A Black Rabbit Dies for its Country*

Born in the lab, I never saw the grass  
or felt the direct touch of wind or sun  
and if a rabbit's nature is to run  
free on the earth, I missed it, though the glass  
never let shot or eager predators pass,

while I was warm against my mother's side  
something was waiting in the centrifuge  
(the world's a cage, although that cage is huge)  
and separate I lived until I died –  
watered and fed, I didn't fret, inside,

and all the time was waiting for the paste  
scooped with a spatula from the metal rim,  
the concentrate bacillus at the brim,  
and lived the life of feeling and of taste.  
I didn't know it. Knowing would be waste

in any case, and anthrax is the hard  
stuff that knocks out the mice, the dogs, the men,  
you haven't any chance at all and when  
they've finished with you, you're down on a card.  
How could I know, to be upon my guard

when they pushed my container into line  
with the infected airstream? Breath is life:  
though something there more deadly than a knife  
cut into me, I was still feeling fine  
and never guessed the next death would be mine,

how many minutes later lungs would choke  
as feet beat out the seconds like a drum,  
hands held me on the table; this was a sum  
with the predictable ending of a joke.  
Fighting I died, and no god even spoke.

## *The Sea-pig*

Five miles through forest from the bathyscaphe,  
great tendrils flapping and the giant rays  
lazily flopping past, no nights or days,  
deep-water darkness, till we saw it, safe  
in our mobility, turning different ways

its eighty metres of a blinded worm  
Far from our friendly shelf and humane surf,  
from sky and sun and rocks and trees and turf,  
we saw it burrow, the metre-thickness squirm,  
great protein sea-pig wriggling like a sperm

into the sand, and throw up a vast mound  
This was the marvel and the flesh we sought,  
the one we looked for, for whom we had brought  
the para-guns, the cable – at last, now, found  
We looked; and swam, good hunting, but no sound,

our little points of light illumined it  
Perhaps in dim perceptiveness it felt  
an alien presence, encircled by a belt  
electrically alerted The guns hit,  
and sand flew in a flurry, in its pit

it hurried down, but losing consciousness,  
more feebly moving no-head, no-feet, no-eyes,  
we were the ant destroyers of its size,  
the thinkers with the more, though so much less,  
cold in our triumph of its giant distress

Until all segments heaved into a rest  
We shot the cables in at several points,  
the joy made movement in our awkward joints  
that clockwork swimming put to such a test  
All old equipment, but we did our best

and after minutes had it well attached,  
the cables in our gloves, and turned for home,  
back to our hardened and transparent dome,  
the effort by the happy outcome matched,  
another legend into living snatched,

the Great Invertebrate at last secured,  
food for the generations yet to come  
The long five miles that would make up the sum  
seemed to us then a nothing, all endured  
with lightness, like an illness easily cured,

# *Ella Mi Fu Rapita!*

*'Die Liebe dauert oder dauert nicht'*

BRECHT

Her boredom took her away. So simple.  
She just became bored with me. No other rival  
experienced the entrancing smile with the dimple  
or put down his drink in joy at her arrival  
or loved her in taxis that stream like ants  
through London, fingers under her pants

caressing her holy of holies. Oh, no  
it wasn't someone younger, bigger or better.  
She went because she had the urge to go,  
without a phone call, telegram or letter.  
From our last meeting she just walked out –  
a few pretexts perhaps. What were they about?

Nothing too serious. A red bow in her hair,  
as she lay naked on the bed, knees-raising,  
stays in my mind. I know I had my share.  
Love is all programmed, it's all phasing,  
there's a beginning, a middle and an end.  
A lover's life is not that of a friend,

who by and large is able to take it or leave it.  
For love there's a critical path – it goes on.  
It can't go backwards or sideways, believe it,  
that's all; a dream, a tremendous con,  
and when it's over, you're out on your own.  
Most life, they say, has to be lived alone.

And what can the lover do, when the time's come,  
when THE END goes up on the screen? Yelling,  
rush into the street, lamenting her lovely bum?  
Get friendly with men in bars, telling  
how sweet she was, praising her statistics,  
or admiring his own sexual ballistics?

No, that's no good. Love lasts – or doesn't last  
And all the pink intimacies and warm kisses  
go into Proust's remembrance of time past  
Lovers must never crumple up like cissies  
or break down or cry about their wrongs  
If girls are sugar, God holds the sugar tongs

## *The Pseudo-Demetrius* \*

After the summer on the lovely island  
came the pretender, the autumn of the city,  
the Pseudo-Demetrius garlanded with blackberries,  
the true young one had strawberries and raspberries  
and the real love in the matchless bed

After the moistness of the pink lips opening  
came the equivocal, the Pseudo-Demetrius,  
the one who told us he would make us equal  
to what we were when the flowers were young ones  
and we knew love in the matchless bed

After the sun's hour, the failing succession  
came with a turbulence but no tenderness,  
the anger and envy of the Pseudo-Demetrius,  
the one who stirred up trouble and caused the ending  
of our best love in the matchless bed

After the green and the bees in clover  
came the new season when we were forgotten,

\* In the history of medieval Russia there are two Pretenders  
They are called Pseudo-Demetrius I and Pseudo-Demetrius II



the riot and sadness of the Pseudo-Demetrius,  
brown leaves falling on the musclemen fighting,  
and no real love in the matchless bed.

After the summer, after the sun's hour,  
came the equivocal, turbulent pretender,  
the Pseudo-Demetrius garlanded with autumn,  
with lies and fighting in the darkened city,  
and death, not love, in the matchless bed.

## *Abelam*

The long-yams are being grown in honour of the moon  
A critic recalls Plisetskaya's celebrated jump  
Soman is somewhere in the worship of the deadly  
The strikers show clever running off the ball  
That harpsichord remembers Michael Haydn.

The rainbow, they say, is a snake of no importance  
The audience is kinky about Khachaturian  
A headline says Hendon Afternoon Dogs  
Some secretaries regard themselves as debts  
Caroline Quoin on Candlewick has a clear round.

The hornbill carvings are definitely phallic  
Graveney is stroking the ball through the covers  
A broken choirboy miscalculates some trills  
Menstruating women are put in special huts  
Blake is accused as a formless draughtsman.

At important ceremonies there are palm-leaf flares  
The Porsches like a plague overrun the country  
Some minds are tickled by the feathers of investiture  
The gin is jumping from the bankers' fountains  
The massed choirs are singing A M D.G

## *Moving on*

If Love has been sitting for hours  
on an Allen Jones girlic chair,  
if I have been given a backscrubber  
for my birthday, if a prominent  
poet wants to kidnap our pussycat,  
if publishers regard themselves  
as Fishers of Men        This  
is all so cosy in the Year of the Dog

If I am a selfish liberal  
socialist, if the office coffee  
tastes of tealeaves, if the  
ice is still on the polar ice cap,  
if I regard my two  
children with tenderness,  
this is the face-down card,  
the life that was dealt me

If what is ordinary still stays  
ordinary, why should I run  
to peanut brittle, put the  
record straight on a Western campus,  
worry about the tweeters and woofers,  
blockade the television with  
a sofa or davenport?  
I am the friend of a healthy ulcer

If the double-barrelled names  
are firing off platitudes,  
if some smooth idiots are  
nursing constituencies,  
if a moneyed party wears  
Enoch's albatross  
my life still moves into  
its twilight, grey is the colour

# The Challenge to Interpretation

Deleterious substances  
are hopping with energy/  
I am severely  
monocoque construction/  
In the blue saucepan  
tempers are rising/  
Two sprauncy birds  
inhibit the parkway/  
The old movie has  
a dancer called Laundrette/

Under the mistletoe  
x-rays are working/  
At the small breakfast  
the bigness of music/  
The men in the fields  
containers for earthworms/  
It is incredible  
the smell of the fish-lake/  
Je n'aime pas  
le *spunk* dans ma bouche/

Crown us  
all tenderly/  
There are no  
differences/  
A black dog  
is barking/  
Love to  
the Apostolate/  
Goodbye  
for ever!

# *On the Death of an Unpleasant Executive*

When the heart attacks  
we all fall  
down.

And, as Milton thought of  
Edward King, it might have  
been me

What will the son think  
about Daddy, dead  
on holiday?

You needn't really  
like them, to  
sympathise

For example imagine  
a crashed car drawn  
to burial,

the judge's black cap  
draped over the  
steering wheel,

moving solemnly  
in reverse, transistor  
music

Black pall on the  
cold radiator; the body  
sable velvet

I hate cars but  
I don't like the  
perishing

I'm sorry for wrecks,  
stray dogs squeeze  
the heart;

even the end of a snobbish  
inefficient idiot is  
the end of

something.

## *People Will Say We're in Love*

But seriously, as the marriage wears on, thanks  
for the memory of hauling prams and shopping up icy door-  
steps, equally as for the kisses and the demon-  
strative eyes. Wives work hard. Cathy and her moor-  
land romance are fine in the mind, but the car-  
ing for babies is the real and most test-  
ing fact of a union. The children are the shar-  
ing. It's always Housewives *v.* The Rest.

And it's always into big offices for the good provid-  
ers, the traditional way to keep the bank man-  
agers happy. Families don't like outsiders. This is men's washing and ironing, fan-  
ning up a little flame of money in the current acc-  
ount. Chores of the typewriter. Essential read-  
ing about Management. Not the true sweetness, sacc-  
harine at best ~ a businessman's Creed.

So the success of a marriage can be seen in the children and, believe me, certainly yours is the credit, after the nappies, the orange juice, the pilfered hours of sleep they took from you, bedtime too often a night shift, and loving not the novelist's outspoken randy young sprawlers, pushing and shoving, but tiredness, the offered and the taken hand

## *The Boss is Thinking*

His secretary has a habit of scrumpling the top copies  
like sheets of a bed she's slept in Take  
those office beauties further  
back  
and they're reading  
'Bunty And The Boo-Boos'  
Before that they're little screaming things  
crawling across the carpet, blue-eyed, in nappies

Good ones, he thinks, are as rare as seven-toed tabbies,  
and the Office Manager tells him put  
just ten girls in an unheated  
room  
and they're making  
warmth like a one-bar fire, yes,  
even the inefficient ones are assets too,  
smiling and carrying into meetings the teas and coffees

They like people, they're not sensitive to hierarchies,  
they're a kind of undisciplined army. Give  
them the lover or father  
touch  
and they're licking  
the saucers and purring, on, on,  
into the unpaid overtime and the cut lunch.  
Boy friends at night with the Greek wine and the  
moussakas.

## *Victorian*

Miss with the vapours.  
The claret and the oysters.  
The curling papers.  
Fat clergy in the cloisters.

Heavy squires hunting.  
Pints of port and porter.  
Grumbling and grunting.  
Gothic bricks and mortar.

Fog in the dockyards.  
Decorum at the Palace.  
Blood in the stockyards.  
Murder in the alleys.

## *The Short Fat Poem*

the secretary describes an Italian holiday/the Managing  
Director's a perfect idiot/there's a lot of spin-off from  
American advertising/someone's an expert on gallium  
arsenide/nobody knows what she'll do if I touch her/  
Dittersdorf is slowly filling the kitchen/the ephemerides  
twirl in the sunshine/the New and Middle Kingdoms  
belong to history/in the big gardens the girls are  
blooming/the guns are firing for Major McMason/  
everyone loves the bestselling novels/the parents are  
sacrificed to the charming children/a US poet displays the  
stigmata/masochists want to sleep with bicycles/ I dream  
of the Queen as a bus conductress

## *The Song*

I am a free ranging hen  
and God put me on this earth  
to pick up the crumbs of intelligence  
I need for my artwork,  
the old how, the variant where, the new when

I am a Gauloise (blue)  
for many years since my birth  
I have been jumbling the words into elegance,  
part pleasure, part work,  
and I have been smoked by the many, bought by the few



I am a sandwich fresh cut,  
eat me aurally, near the bone  
and juicy the ham was, desiccated  
the pub clock will make it –  
catch me by the vanishing rabbit's quick scut.

I am a bottle of wine,  
the wrath in my grapes homegrown,  
drink me; those who hesitated  
were never able to take it.  
Slup me rough and homely and I'll taste fine.

## *& Son*

Even if he thinks  
poetry is something made with a wheel,  
and Art  
somebody's christian name,  
and never willingly  
reads a book in his life . . .

eats hard, drinks,  
turns into a layabout or a heel,  
that's part  
of life – the very same  
that so chillingly  
faces the world and his wife –

if too much love  
floats the sons out on the main stream,  
moves away  
from what fathers did;  
so does reaction  
against a cosy family firm.

In the iron glove  
is the velvet hand? and men cream,  
goatishly gay,  
result a new kid  
goes into action,  
there's a future in sperm,

but what he is  
doesn't matter How can a father not  
love his own  
son? though you could call  
it narcissism,  
or otherwise analyse,

it's not showbiz,  
it's genuine, a saint or a clot,  
blood and bone,  
he's holy, the source of all  
heresy, schism  
But lovable by the wise

## ✓ *The Select Party*

| Hands that wiped arses  
| are holding glasses,  
| lips that fellated  
| are intoxicated,  
| parts that were randy  
| have counterparts handy –

but the fact of a quorum  
preserves decorum,  
and the social unction  
inhibits the function  
of the natural passions  
concealed by the fashions

Tongues that licked scrota  
don't move one iota  
from the usual phrases  
that the century praises,  
the undisturbed labia  
are deserted Arabia –

these cats are all mousers  
but skirts and trousers  
keep the lid on the kettle;  
there are magnets, there's metal,  
but they don't click together  
thru nylon and leather.

## *The Sentimental Education*

Wear your Thomas Hardy suit and sit with candles in the  
gloom.  
Summon ghosts of years departed till they fill the empty  
room.

First of all call up the weather – heatwave 1922,  
Wartime winters with the blackout, blossom on the trees  
at Kew.

Then the people. First, a nanny. Next, your father  
wearing spats.  
Mummy with her pearls at evening, and her three  
amazing cats.

Childish captions fit the pictures – you were very childish  
then –

But you see it still as clearly as the present world of men.

Peter Pan was pulsing drama, green lights shone on  
Captain Hook  
Carroll's Jabberwock caused nightmares, till you had to  
hide the book.

You were one Then came two sisters They were  
different from you  
You liked best fried bread and cocoa, loved the zebras at  
the Zoo

Then the schools – a bourgeois saga – we all know what  
they were like  
Minnows in a pond, a bully swam among them like a  
pike

Squeeze them in? You'd need a ballroom Still  
remembered, many names  
Cluster round in shorts and sweaters Latin, algebra and  
games

Chapel services Then freedom, and the length of King's  
Parade  
Dadie, Anthony – and Classics, all the dons that had it  
made

Cicero made ghastly speeches, elegiacs were a bore  
You had two years in the saltmines – how could you  
come up for more?

Next was English, Richards lectures, Leavis supervising  
Fine  
English literature went down as stimulating as new wine

After Cambridge – unemployment No one wanted  
much to know  
Good degrees are good for nothing in the business world  
below

In the end you were a salesman, selling lithographic  
prints  
Trade was stagnant after Munich Hitler frightened us  
with hints

War came down, a blackout curtain, shutting out the kindly sun.

Jews went under, all the playboys somehow lost their sense of fun.

Still, we always had the weather – freezing cold or hot as hell –

Birds continued, flowers were rampant, life went on through shot and shell.

Back at last to shabby London, tired and rationed, sad to see,

With its tales of air raid wardens, siren suits and hot sweet tea.

People, literary people, now replaced the roaring boys  
Fond of vino, signorinas, dirty jokes and lots of noise.

Tambi, Nicholas and Helen. Come on in. You see them plain.

Publishing will never, surely, be as odd as that again.

Money, said the British Council, I have money in my hand.

Get your hair cut, keep your nose clean, live in Civil Serviceland.

Six years later came the end game – middle grades were axed. Goodbye!

They were victims of the Beaver's petulant persistent cry.

Advertising. Advertising. Fatal Lady of the Lake!  
No one opts for copywriting, they get in there by mistake.

You absorbed those business ethics – not the Sermon on the Mount –

Walked into that artful parlour, had the William Hill account.

Let the room explode with whizz kids, dollies, every  
kind of Pop!

Only crematorium silence brings that mayhem to a stop

Money Children Mortgage Rat race Anxious words  
that tax the brain

Nagging fears of unemployment drive the middle class  
insane

It's not pretty when they throw you, screaming, in the  
empty sack,

Filled with nothing but the cries of wives and children  
screaming back

Does the working class get ulcers? No one worries much,  
if so

They know jobs are hard to come by, and the pay is often  
low

They're inured to thoughts of hardship and of being out  
of work

This is life It's no good blubbing, throwing fits or going  
berserk

Moneyed men in Lloyds, the City, can't imagine what  
it's like

To the driver of an E-type, what's the old penurious  
bike?

Workmen are a bloody nuisance – just a ROAD UP sign  
or two –

Obstacles that spoil their record from the Bank to Luton  
Hoo

Keep your voice down Don't start shouting Let the  
candles burn up straight

(Privileged and trendy diners stuff themselves with After  
Eight )

All you learn – and from a lifetime – is that that's the way  
it goes.  
That's the crumbling of the cookie, till the turning up of  
toes.

## *The Ewart Organization*

The Chairman's a charming graduate.  
He does no work. He just inspires everybody.

The Deputy Chairman makes a few decisions.  
He's very good at speaking after dinner.

The Managing Director shouts down the telephone.  
His worries affect the lining of his stomach.

The executives wear dark suits, collars and ties.  
They live their lives in memos of meetings.

The sales force whizz round the country in cars.  
They sell soap even when the roads are icy.

The men on the factory floor are bored to extinction.  
They're not alive, they go through the motions.

The secretaries are picked for their nubile attractions.  
They type, varnish their nails, tell everything often.

There's a lot of life in the Ewart Organization.  
Needless to say, I am the Chairman.

## *The Young Seduction Poem*

I chatted it up, admired it birdwise,  
and smoothed it very gently wordwise,  
I filled it full of gins and fed it,  
it very sweetly smiled and said it  
would come with me for the week-end

I drove it down, its gear was swinging,  
under its breath it started singing,  
it fluttered its enormous lashes,  
giving out with dots and dashes,  
to morse me it was my good friend

I gave it lunch, I gave it kissing,  
it told me that its heart was missing  
on several cylinders and after  
it broke into loud girlish laughter,  
I felt its will begin to bend

I moved it out that night for eating,  
the wine took a terrific beating,  
I brought it back and overhauled it  
It kept its knickers on and stalled it –  
money was all that I could spend

## *Dean Swift Watches Some Cows*

How, when they lift their Tails, the Shit shoots out!  
A foul Volcanoe next a Waterspout  
The Anus and Vagina are so near,  
Each lovely Dame cannot repress a Tear  
To think she's modelled on the selfsame Pattern  
And so are Queens, and so is ev'ry Slattern



'Twas the Propinquity of these two Holes  
That made Divines doubt Women had not Souls.  
They knew those Furrows that would bear the Tilt –  
Men could not choose but sow their Seed in Filth –  
And how from Ordure sprung could Life be good  
Or Mystery be part of Womanhood?

## *2001: The Tennyson/Hardy Poem*

When I am old and long turned grey  
And enjoy the aura of being eighty,  
I may see the dawn of that critical day  
When my lightest verse will seem quite weighty.  
I shall live somewhere far away,  
Where the illiterate birds are nesting.  
To pilgrim admirers my wife will say:  
    Ewart is resting.

Instead of the heedless sensual play  
And the youthful eyes of love and brightness  
I shall see critics who kneel and pray  
In homage – I shan't dispute their rightness –  
And Supplements keen to seem okay  
Will flatter me with fulsome pieces.  
Scholars will put it another way:  
    Ewart's a thesis.

When the aching back and the bleary eye  
And the dimness and the rationed drinking,  
The cold unease of the earth and sky,  
Leave me no pleasures except thinking  
I shall be warmed (but what will be 'I')?  
With the awe inspired by what's Jurassic,  
And people will say, before I die:  
    Ewart's a classic.

Soon comes the day when the stream runs dry  
And the boat runs back as the tide is turning,  
The voice once strong no more than a sigh  
By the hearth where the fire is scarcely burning  
Stiff in my chair like a children's guy,  
Simply because I have no seniors  
The literati will raise the cry  
Ewart's a genius!

## *The Language of Love*

HARRIS *Euphemia Dorothy* – *In ever loving memory of our darling Muth We thank you sweetheart for all your love and devotion – Dadwad and Ossisy, Billy Buntnums, Jack, Peter and Dickums The Times, 4 March 1970*

Like a baby-talking tea cosy,  
how such names polish up the silver,  
count the teaspoons,  
lock up tight  
with goodnight kisses!

That sunset is too rosy –  
but all the nuclear power of Wylfa,  
the magical runes  
of the owl night,  
can't keep cissies

from strongly inbred feeling,  
and it's certainly very often better  
to have than not  
in a hard life  
The affluent families

perhaps are the most revealing  
of the soft love that transcends the letter?  
A meal kept hot  
by a fond wife?  
Battles like Ramillies,

with the indecisive victors  
at the blasting domestic cannon,  
are usual here  
and the rough poor  
can't afford lovey-dovey.

Strict as the iron lictors,  
no imaged sentimental Shannon,  
Time is no clear  
stream past their door –  
partridges in a covey,

harsh words fly up so quickly,  
if there's chocolate it's likely to be bitter,  
for most of us –  
and we shun  
loveterms like rabies

but one can react *too* slickly,  
there's a slight nervousness in the titter.  
Ridiculous?  
It's sad fun –  
and in some ways we remain babies.

## Literary Unions

*I have met with women whom I really think would like  
to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel*

JOHN KEATS, 8 July 1819

When the husband and wife sit  
typing their novels, back to back,  
there's a dialogue as the letters clack?  
One stops for a smoke or a bit

of advice is asked, an adjective weighed?  
This would be extremely cosy  
if there were no such thing as jealousy –  
and writing's an honourable trade

But when it's *writers* the girl wants  
then one should start to run  
If she's dying to be married to one  
you'll be treated like Mary Quant's

last year's creation, there's  
danger of a change of fashion  
Watch when warning lights flash on  
It could all end in tears

It's equally bad if each word  
you speak is treated like Holy Writ  
Being worshipped is boring, it  
can make you feel absurd

unless you're arrogant enough to take  
it like when Venus flopped on Adonis,  
there are some literary phoneys  
who revel in it and no mistake

So it's best when the girl's just  
a girl, and reads the *Sun*,  
hasn't heard of John Donne  
and flaunts an illiterate bust.

# *The Sexy Airs of Summer*

In the summer the sex comes –  
for even the greatest poets.  
Gito and Tryphoena get  
ready for a long ride.  
It's very natural, really.

There's a baring of soft bums;  
all simple, and we know it's  
compulsory (almost), a set  
book, and open wide  
to interpretation. Ideally,

the serious say, the best  
writers think it trivial.  
But there's a Goddess – or two –  
who flaunts a divine gash  
and takes no account of meanies

who won't admit the guest  
or splosh the wine, convivial,  
as I do or as, probably, you  
do. She has an unfash-  
ionable love of the penis?

Yes, she has. But it's not  
admitted by poetry-lovers.  
They have animals and trees  
on the brain, sunsets, blue  
sky, isolated images,

true love that simmers hot  
between the book's covers  
(novels have tits and knees).

Sex? Why, they'd sue  
the Muse for damages!

## *From the Phrase Book*

Surely it is only right to arrive  
With a satisfactory sausage for Germaine?

He is very sick, he has taken an overdraft  
The label tells Pour in two heaping teaspoons

There is something wrong with my transmission  
I was slightly oiled at the Service Station

Did you not buy it for two hundred florins?  
You will not get much change out of him

\ In this country it is not politic to talk  
| But our new prison is the best in the world

\ Drive to the left, Sir, and take the motorway  
| That is the fastest road to the Cemetery

# *The So-called Sonnets\**

## *Sonnet: Lifetime*

I wear a big codpiece to show I am the King.  
There's nothing more public than a private soldier.  
My thoughts decorate the walls as crude as posters,  
they're simple in their blazing primary colours  
and flat, not subtle. Every weekday morning  
the office smells of vending machine coffee  
and warm paper. But outside it's cold.  
One must do nothing to offend one's liege-lord.

The great generalizing poets of the past  
run onto sandbanks in a land of detail,  
percentage was a word they never knew.  
Literature's full of tie-wigs and laudanum,  
pen-pushers, typewriter-tappers, tape-decks.  
We may be in at the burning of the books.

\* Any poem that has its title prefixed by the word Sonnet is one of the So-called Sonnets – fourteen lines divided into an octet and a sextet, rough and unrhyming. Usually the latter develops, or comments upon, the former

## *Sonnet: Soho and West, Saturday Morning*

A day when you can't see the top of the Post Office  
Tower

A mild, oily precipitation Overall  
In my milk bar the muzak wistfully plays  
'Pennies From Heaven' Outside it's a plague city,  
few walkers in the streets I move among them  
like a secret man, my thoughts are phrases,  
I am the agent of a foreign Power My language  
would terribly bore dog-fanciers tubed to Cruft's

The words sit up and beg I pat them down,  
change trains at Earl's Court It's a sort of play,  
tail-wagging energy finally brought to heel  
Meanwhile on the roof of the Playboy Club  
two Union Jacks, Old Glory, one Bunny Flag Two cars,  
like sensual man's two-fingers-up to Culture,

## *Sonnet: A Sectarian View*

God is on my side He will protect me  
against the Holebrooks and the Whitearses who  
go about like raging roaring lions  
seeking whom they may devour And against  
all those who think that sex is dirty  
They have cast several snares for my feet  
but I shall rise above them, levitate  
into free air, in pure priggish apartheid



Those demons, those deluded, those obsessed  
with every innocent bodily function –  
surely with scorpions He will drive them out?  
Those lawmakers for others, will not He chastise them?  
As they wriggle in their lewd imaginings.  
Bad pilgrims, labelled NOT WANTED ON VOYAGE.

## *Sonnet: Poetry is the Dustbin of the Emotions*

As invalids simply revel in invalid port,  
so we love our disabilities. They go well into verse.  
And that great cannon booming: Fear of Death.  
Just pick up everything that the cat brought in  
and throw it into the well-turned stanzas  
or little pointless poems. Anything not very nice  
or painful or depressed – the Muse likes these.  
So poetry gets a reputation for being unhappy.

How can we make the unbelievers see  
that what to them is only sad or bitter  
for us is purging of the discontents  
that ride us, spur us? Blood is in the ink,  
but it's a kind of homœopathic cure.  
Casting the runes on demons. Exorcised!

## *Sonnet: Away Games*

Some agro from a Rumanian referee  
The ball bouncing unevenly Skidding on the mud  
An acting-injured, jersey-pulling oppositon  
The crowd with klaxons, noise to blow the mind  
One unearned penalty That, you might say, was it  
If it's against you, then it's all against you,  
the gods of football haven't heard of justice,  
like poetry, the word 'fair' won't translate

For us the world is one huge object found,  
random with art and wars and income tax,  
the very lack of pattern is a pattern,  
as it swivels through space, an awkward  
high ball in the air, it's lucky or unlucky  
Lucky for some, for some, bad medicine

## *Sonnet: What is Needed*

A complete new sex Not those dreary old men and  
women,  
where the beautiful are so pleased to be beautiful  
and the unattractive live in outer darkness,  
but a real democracy where everyone's equal and  
opposite  
and nobody's under proof Satisfaction guaranteed  
That would be something If jealousy and frustration  
could be thrown into the everlasting dustbin,  
what an end to sourness and the moulds of madness!

We live, however, in an unregenerate country.  
There's no sign yet of that desired mutation.  
Monsters are wearing briefs and ties and waistcoats  
and filling the world with hours of quiet agony.  
Sprightliness wears the bowler hats of boredom  
and young difficulties fill the bras and panties.

## *Sonnet: The Days and Nights to Come*

An immense ballroom. Thirties style. And hired  
by an immense Company: annual Dinner Dance.  
The girls are young and beautiful, so beautiful  
you could light a cigar at them. They burn,  
some hundreds of them, with traditional ardour;  
flaming youth.

Hairstyles; and tits displayed, old salesmen's jokes:  
make a clean breast of it. They shake in joy,  
so loving it all, so loving the young men

and (most) themselves. Give it just fifteen years –  
or ten. They're kitchen-sinking. Eyes are underlined,  
what love did once is now the old routine;  
the joint is jumping, sizzling. It's a gas.  
The kids have spread that body like a quilt,  
A sad negro sings: 'It's a wonderful world!'

## *Sonnet: Queering the Pitch*

They say this fattening body was given me,  
with its partial tolerance of minor drugs –  
so that it climbs out of a hangover into living  
like a fly clambering up the side of a huge glass of gin  
They say there is a pattern in the carpet  
and a grand design is being knitted on big needles,  
they seriously believe this, like the people  
who know their dogs understand every word they say

And the last man ever to bag a Purple Emperor  
and the first man ever to softshoe moondust  
are working out something that was always  
programmed

But I hold to a belief in what is random,  
with a backward look at old stone gods in gardens  
At the latest tit-count J Walter Thompson were leading

## *Sonnet: Sentimental Journeys*

Noel Coward has been handed down to us Noel  
Coward

is a flower that's free Where are the songs  
we sung? Nostalgia comes so easy  
at all levels, and usually mixed with music  
So even highbrows adore adventure stories,  
they got us young, incipient critics, before so many  
thousands of words poured through the ageing eyes,  
the great works of the serious couldn't move us more

Don't fool yourself. It's simply because they're *yours*  
you value bad music, dubious books; they're emotive  
landmarks,  
part of *your* life. So as you love yourself  
you love the secret heiress, the brave cabin boy,  
the first books self-read, self-chosen. Blackmore,  
G. A. Henty.

Literary merit would be by accident only.

## *Sonnet: Books*

So many books are crying out loud 'Unfair!',  
see themselves Bronte-wise, wronged governesses  
who could tell the neighbours a thing or two. Injustice.  
Novels are written to prove the world's a cad,  
and every morning someone wakes up to the fact  
he/she is married to an unpleasant person.  
There's something in it. But what were you expecting?  
No justice can turn back the springing tiger.

If the beleaguered heroine dies from the bite of a badger  
or a wasp sting, that is tragic/comic  
but a more likely cause of death than heartbreak.  
Most of what happens can't be budgeted for,  
cry-babies invite the joyful persecution.  
It's a dog world – but still the only one.

## Sonnet: Intimations of Mortality in the Lower Richmond Road

A poster says 'Buy Wandsworth Bonds', on a bookstall  
is a copy of *The Slave Of The Lamp* by H Seton

Merriman, a

novel that warns against the Society of Jesus

Buying bonds is also a warning What is coming is the

Future,

within fifty yards I pass two old blinding dogs

grey-muzzled as the grey of my carside longhair

With them and with all the old shrivelled women of

Putney

I have sympathy, we queue for something in common

I don't want to die, I want to write more and

much better poems, a harmless ambition Also, I don't

want to leave

the sexual objects They link so directly

with a dark-haired undergraduate who was nervous

and silly We all want to get as close as possible to

that nice girl But the skin is a barrier

## *Sonnet: The Only Emperor is the Emperor of Ice Cream*

I want a new half million pound account  
that I can bash into with hammer-headed words,  
revolutionize the agency's billing, put myself  
among the greatest writers of TV spots for ever,  
something so classical that books on advertising  
will quote it for cub copywriters: a new King Lear  
but bringing consumer comfort, a Verdi  
of cornflakes or detergents consoling all.

That's the way the kids get fed and clothed.  
Consumer goods beget consumer goods,  
the god is eaten. Self-perpetuating markets  
demand our sacrifice, my bending of the mind  
I offer up to cans and aerosols and packs.  
Surely someday those shining gods will speak?

## *Sonnet: Concert in Leighton House*

Missed seeing his grandson by sixteen years.  
We didn't get on. For textbook reasons.  
My father a difficult man, with a difficult life.  
Something of that disturbed adolescence  
comes at me now with Schumann's Sturm und Drang,  
violin and piano warring through the air  
passionate hate, a bitter kind of love,  
that close at last, resolved in tingling silence.

Bathing on walls Lord Leighton's bushless beauties  
wear a Victorian calm, the spiritual Burne-Jones faces  
invite a martyrdom as quiet as muted strings  
After the life, the artefacts are quiet,  
a harmony under glass, dead piano keys  
What I regret is also fixed for ever

### *Sonnet: The Last Things*

Of course there's always a last everything  
The last meal, the last drink, the last sex  
The last meeting with a friend The last  
stroking of the last cat, the last  
sight of a son or daughter Some would be more  
charged with emotion than others – if one knew  
It's not knowing that makes it all so piquant  
A good many lasts have taken place already

Then there are last words, variously reported,  
such as Let not poor Nelly starve Or  
I think I could eat one of Bellamy's veal pies  
If there were time I'd incline to a summary  
Alcohol made my life shorter but more interesting  
My father said (not last perhaps) Say goodbye to Gavin



# *An Imaginary Love Affair* (1974)

*'All love affairs are imaginary'*

## *The Lover Complains*

Writing your name on steamed-up windows,  
standing at bus-stops where you've stood.  
Such things can do no harm, but they don't do much  
good.

Small presents treated like holy relics,  
your words treasured like those of saints.  
Such love is a religion that neither fails nor faints?

Drinking to you in pubs – but lonely,  
without you, without the lip or hand.  
Such are the contacts that bring comfort. Do you  
understand?

It's a kind of long-range worship.  
I want it closer, very very close.  
Such love would be real and solid, not distant and  
verbose.

## *Writing the Poems of Loss*

Some poets even seem to enjoy  
writing the poems of loss  
that are so truly sad and affecting.

I've always preferred to keep hold,  
loving the girl, though her loss  
may be what I'm expecting

A poem's no use on a bed  
(though they talk of 'pleasing the eye'),  
it's a poor, very poor, consolation  
What's the use, when she just isn't there,  
bringing the tear to the eye  
of Eng Lit admiration?

There's a time for the masterly plaint  
weeping the loss of the flower  
That time isn't yet, so don't rush it  
Keep the heartfelt iambs on ice  
Human love is a delicate flower –  
a canto could crush it

## *To a Plum-Coloured Bra Displayed in Marks & Spencer*

The last time I saw you, as like as two pins,  
you were softly supporting those heavenly twins  
that my hands liberated before the gas fire  
in the mounting impatience of driving desire,

when the nipples appeared with their cherry-ripe tips,  
so inviting to fingers and tongues and to lips  
as they hardened and pardoned my roughness and haste  
and both had, like her body, a feminine taste

You're a bra made in millions, promiscuously sold –  
but your sister contained something dearer than gold  
Mass-production, seduction, you've got it all there  
on that counterfeit torso so cold and so bare,

but you serve to remind me, as nothing else could,  
of the heartbeats and touching, what's tender and good.  
I could ikon you, candle you, kneel on the floor,  
my love's symbol of richness – in all else I'm poor!

## *Cleft for Me*

Ah! Cleft for me! the lover cries,  
that simple girlish part  
as powerful as expressive eyes  
though further from the heart!  
From birth ordained, o She divine,  
existing only to be mine!

Existing in that little girl  
beneath the tiny skirt,  
as winsome as a walnut whirl,  
a tireless, heartless flirt,  
fashioned by Venus, made to be  
open and friendly just to me!

Oh, lover, your romantic pen  
has carried you away;  
it has been loved by other men,  
and that auspicious day  
when that wet sponge assuaged your thirst  
won't be the last, was not the first.

## *Hurried Love*

Those who make hurried love don't do so  
from any lack of affection  
or because they despise their partner  
as a human being –  
what they're doing  
is just as sincere as a more formal wooing

She may have a train to catch, perhaps the  
room is theirs for one hour only  
or a mother is expected back or  
some interruption  
known, awaited –  
so the spur of the moment must be celebrated

Making love against time is really  
the occupation of all lovers  
and the clock-hands moving  
point a moral  
not crude, but clever  
are those who grab what soon is gone for ever

## *The Lover Reflects: Hearts That We Broke Long Ago Have Long Been Breaking Others*

You tell me about an old affair  
with a painter, on a top floor, in Chelsea,  
(perhaps there is nothing quite so silly  
as retrospective jealousy)  
that lasted for two years – a 'long affair'  
you say – and I picture you  
in love with a man who is unimaginable

My desire is equally to have been him  
and to have been you; even to hear of  
shared love in past summers is soothing,  
since I am a man who has never loved  
anybody who loved him.  
So it's nice to know such things can happen.  
As of now I am flirting with the ugliness of age.

This feeling is wistful, a kind of sweet and sour  
pork, in terms of a Chinese menu.  
Perhaps if I could sit with half a bottle of vodka,  
mixing it with water in a glass,  
pouring it in slowly, some peace would come?  
The truth is, I've never been good at sharing.  
To describe you adequately, these dead words fall short.

## *The Lover Writes a Heterosexual Lyric*

Far less than a hundred years from now  
your glorious cunt will be dust (or ashes).  
But how to forget you? Tell me how!  
The thunder explodes, the lightning flashes,

the emotions drum up a romantic storm,  
and *your* face smiles in that lurid light.  
Love is exclusive, and that is the norm:  
a central attraction, not left or right.

You are the one, and the tired old words  
run slick off the biro, but still are true.  
Nature is fine, with the bees and the birds,  
but the only Nature I want is you.

Nobody else quite has your face,  
or there's something wrong with the eyes or hair,  
that's why nobody can replace  
the you that is no longer there

The more they're like you, the more it hurts  
They remind all right – but that right's still wrong  
He's a hard man who coldly smiles and flirts  
when that siren is singing her undersong

and I'm not hard, and I hear each note  
clear as a bell in that dismal grey,  
like a tiny figure on a twilight boat,  
smaller and smaller, you sail away

## *Pushing the Boat Out*

You didn't ever ask me  
to fall in love with you –  
I was just someone new –  
yet the result's the same  
as if you were to blame

And I could never hate you,  
you walk around so sweet,  
between your hair and feet  
you carry what to me  
is Beauty and Eve's tree

But when you push the boat out,  
I know and understand,  
you can't say where you'll land  
A girl took off a dress  
for joy – and my distress

# *The Lover Doesn't Complain*

Although it's sad, of course,  
when a love affair ends,  
it comes as a relief –  
mixed in with the grief  
(for you can never be friends)  
is the joy of the pastured horse.

Don't sing 'Abide with Me' –  
though you miss that little room  
and all her dark strong charm  
you cosseted with your arm,  
never relapse into gloom,  
at least, in a sense, you're free.

The not knowing where you stand,  
the lover's old despair –  
only the greatest fools  
pursue a love that cools –  
are gone with her stirring hair  
and her adored small hand.

But oh! (as the poets say)  
how lovely if she had  
loved you completely too!  
When a girl is keen on you  
and both together go mad  
that will be the day!

## *A Dialogue between the Head and Heart*

(Of course, she's only a digestive tube, like all of us.  
Yes, but look what it's attached to!

## *The Lovers Reflects on Consolation Prizes*

When you tell me I look very nice  
or give me a parting kiss on the cheek,  
this all shows kindness and friendliness  
but it's really harder to bear  
than the weary fact of the separation

because I know, and you know,  
that these are Consolation Prizes,  
saying Sorry, you weren't good enough  
and Better luck next time,  
so at once I am saddened with envy

of a laughing beautiful woman  
who can choose her men easily  
and drop them without much trouble  
into the deep pit of Loss –  
my circumstances are exactly the opposite

## *The Lover Writes a One-word Poem*

You!



## *In the Saloon Bar*

Each Cornish pastie on the bar-top  
is ridge-backed like a stegosaurus.

As he waits he remembers  
a muff-diver's treasure trove:  
a piece of blue loo paper wedged between the lips,  
the loop of a tampax.  
Tonguing the wild expressions of his love.

Some words were said, of course:  
I'm very fond of you.

When the girl's beautiful  
you get frightened –  
and too great love can lead to failure.  
A lot of women  
go for the men who are almost indifferent.

That garden gate is closed now.  
Looked through but not entered.

An infinite sadness  
swims in the wineglass –  
like Housman's memory of blue hills.  
The young beer-drinkers  
are sloshing their pints to the sound of muzak.

## *The Lover Reflects: Afterwards*

Perhaps I was greedy. I know I should be grateful.  
You wanted a snack and I wanted a plateful.

## *Too Little Care of This*

Too little to eat, a big chance  
of being killed or wounded  
(most countries are being run by Armies,  
full of brave efficient unpleasant men),

unfortunates in millions,  
and in my literate comfort I complain?  
It's all the fault of the glands  
that make me forget she's just an ordinary woman

This leads, as it has always led, to  
the talk of goddesses and eternal love,  
the envy that, being beautiful,  
her face can launch a thousand other men

on my same sea.  
Conversely, though, I was the one  
that felt the excitement of the adoring heart  
It could be a bore

to attract too many people Vanity, yes,  
might smile a bit, but this must make her life  
complicated Since nobody goes for me,  
my love was at least a simple thing

## *Hearing the Love Note*

You never called me Darling  
Except when you were coming

# Memory Man

I'm sitting drinking Guinness  
in memory of you,  
on the wall is written Finis  
and although the love was true –  
if I were more romantic I would say sublime –  
it was not a love that lasted until closing time.

The glasses are being polished  
as they shout 'Last orders, please!'  
and illusions are demolished  
with the same fantastic ease  
as the ease with which Joe closes his democratic bar –  
if I think of you now, it's 'you were' and not 'you are'.

Each man that loves a woman  
must be prepared for this  
for a sexual love is human  
and betrayal by a kiss  
is a commonplace and not just in the holy Book  
and it all begins when your eyes take that first long look.

You must have the boldness  
to overcome the moods,  
the sulking and the coldness,  
your love must feed on foods  
which wouldn't keep alive a common tabby cat;  
no one can have *this* without an awful lot of *that*.

So it's sadly time to drink up  
and let them stack the chairs –  
he's a wise man who can think up  
a remedy that bears  
much resemblance to an answer (Venus is a jerk?);  
for that holiday is over – from now on it's back to work.

# *Be My Guest! (1975)*

## *To the Gentle One*

Hiding under the leaves, where the fruit grows,  
I can see you, you horrible reader,  
nibbling my poems, a dirty feeder

I know your coarse appetite for prose,  
how your tiny jaws cut the pages,  
digesting fat books in your larval stages

I understand how you go into deep sleep  
in the middle of long American sagas  
like a beer-drinker after fifteen lagers

You're dazed and pupal, you little creep,  
in your lepidopterous coma,  
oblivious to fruit or flower aroma

When you emerge from your illiterate night  
your wings will take time drying  
but your next interest will be flying

So prepare yourself now for a genuine fright,  
my non-loved one, my undarling  
I shall be there waiting – as a starling

# *The Larkin Automatic Car Wash*

Back from the Palace of a famous king,  
Italian art  
Making the roped-off rooms a Culture thing,  
At about five o'clock we made a start,  
Six teenagers squashed in. And as I drove  
North from the barley sugar chimney pots  
They sang the changeable teenager songs  
That fade like tapestries those craftsmen wove,  
But centuries more quickly. Through the knots  
Of road-crossing pedestrians, through the longs

And shorts of planners' morse, the traffic lights,  
Over a hill,  
Down to the garage advertising tights,  
A special bargain, fast I drove on till  
I drew up by the new Car Wash machine,  
Pride of the forecourt, where a sign said STOP  
Clear on the asphalt. In front a smaller car  
Stood patiently as brushes swooshed it clean,  
Whirling its streaming sides and back and top –  
A travelling gantry; verticals, cross-bar.

We wound our windows up and waited there.  
In pixie green  
The moving monster lifted itself clear,  
The yellow brushes furled and now were seen  
As plastic Christmas trees. Its wet last client  
Made for the highway and it was our turn.  
In gear and under. Two tenpences fed in  
A slot on the driver's side. The pliant  
Great brushes whirled and closed. Like yellow fern  
One blurred the windscreen. Underwater thin

The Science Fiction light came creeping through  
Alien and weird  
As when the vegetables invade in *Dr Who*,  
Something to be amused at – almost feared.

And as the lateral brushes closed our sides,  
Sweeping past steadily back, the illusion came  
That *we* were moving forward, and I checked  
The hard-on handbrake, thought of switchback rides  
And how the effect in childhood was the same –  
Momentary fear that gathered, to collect

In joy of safety The tall half-children screamed –  
The girls at least –  
Delighted to be frightened, as it seemed,  
By this mechanical, otherworldly beast  
The boys made usual, window-opening, jokes  
And soon, tide-turning, the brushes travelled back,  
Put our imaginations in reverse,  
Though we were still Like cigarettes and cokes  
This was their slight excitement, took up slack  
In time that wound by, idle Nothing worse

And nothing better To me it seemed so short,  
I wanted more,  
I wanted hours, I wanted to be caught  
In that dense undergrowth by that wet shore  
This was an exit from our boring life,  
A changed environment, another place,  
A hideout from the searchers Otherness  
Was that world's commonplace, a kitchen knife,  
Something so usual that it had no face –  
As the car dripped unnatural cleanliness

Yes, it was jolly, *Fun for the kids* we say,  
But more than that;  
For if you look at it another way  
This was a notable peak where all is flat  
Into the main road by the riverside  
We right-turned past the pubs that line the route  
Where cheering crowds watch boat race crews go by,  
Travelling with the full incoming tide  
The roof, the sides, the bonnet and the boot  
Shone with new wetness Yet the dust could lie

As thick there as before; and would, in time,

This was reprieve.

Cars too grow old and dirty. Gin-and-lime  
Perks up the guest; but all guests have to leave.  
In through the main gate of the block of flats  
I drove my giggling adolescent load,  
And in vibrating door-slammed solitude  
I parked. Under their different hats  
Spiritual experiences work in a kind of code.  
Did I have one? I, from this multitude?

### *From V.C. (a Gentleman of Verona)*

Give me the Daulian bird and Locrian Arsinoë.  
I want to arrange a protest in high places.  
I just want to say to a few fat-nippled goddesses:  
It isn't fair.

It's your door that I'm complaining about.  
It's far too neutral. It admits revolting lovers,  
fast talkers and political nitwits.  
I hate it.

It never speaks but if it did I know it  
would have an American accent, smacking  
its lips and saying, glutinously: 'That girl's a  
cocksucker.'

If I had my way it would be closed for ever  
against those pretentious people whose main crime  
is that they aren't me. It should only open,  
youwise, mewards.

Doors are disgusting They'll let in anything –  
secret police, creditors, puritan censors,  
men with eviction orders They're great painted  
layabouts

But that I know it can keep out competition,  
I'd have it off its hinges Don't talk about oiling!  
It's a Public Enemy – to me, you, and Venus  
a complacent traitor

## *For Lord John Roxton*

Tell it all gently  
there is no aftermath/  
you in the Albany  
poured the stiff whiskies/  
the lionhunting gentry  
covered the dinosaurs/

Cigars went with bravery  
the yarns of the hinterland/  
it was a policy  
you had a stab at it/  
you had no family  
winging pteranodons/

Spotless the napery  
women were virtuous/  
where was the fallacy  
you never guessed at?/  
in the big library  
beards had a theory



# *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

*(and Who Was Datchery?)*

Mr Crisparkle  
is absolutely  
                  masturbating with  
muscular christianity,  
a cornflake breakfast.

He is the commissar  
who tells everybody  
                  what they have to  
do. He has Neville  
buttoned in 17 pockets.

Little Rosebud  
swaps ST's with  
                  Helena. Edwin  
is the goalless  
unmarked footballer.

Mr Grewgious  
is just another  
                  pure living wet dreamer,  
Miss Twinkleton  
inserts a ruler.

But stay! who  
is this totally  
                  melodramatic  
opium-smoking  
tomb-haunter?

Who with Durdles  
owlhunts the old ones?  
Down by the weir  
he worships Kali,  
J.J. to the boardroom,

the double-lifer  
among the singles  
He is the  
real one, the true  
hip hypocrite

## *The Afterflu Afterlife*

Life is so strict that every act must rhyme,  
Centipede poem beating out the time,  
While dry lips lust for ice, for ice and lime,  
While plonking rhythm meets the hourly chime  
To make the written mime a paradigm

Of journey through the sameness of its tense,  
Where brightest cities give the most offence  
And meaning runs on darkly past the dense  
Forest of black hysterical no-sense,  
A low unvarying fence, without pretence

To shine in sun, or even to reflect  
The moonlight, where a man might stand erect  
And from some possibilities select  
The difference they told him to expect,  
In this or that respect We genuflect

Before such length of sentence; it is long,  
And birds are bursting, not bursting into song,  
But under foxes' teeth, and a dull gong,  
Booms in an artform that is wholly wrong,  
But right where we belong; the gardener's prong

Spears nuisances in the bad undergrowth  
And slow and otherworldly is the sloth  
That creeps with treelife, and we have them both,  
Archaic too, as meaningless and loth  
We heard the dead word 'troth' once in Arbroath.

To cross the ice before the ice can crack,  
To tighten muscles now deformed and slack,  
To straighten the curved-in bedridden back,  
To run once more with the commuting pack?  
To stumble with the hack? The answer's black

And harsher than the rook or raven's caw  
And comes as quickly as the jay or daw  
Flies the grey wolf's unheard marauding paw.  
All are timebound and subject to Time's law,  
That was the scene we saw. The wind is raw,

The angels don't appear to tell us: 'Lo!  
This must be done, for it is written so!'  
The gods don't answer the imploring O!,  
Sad islands form this archipelago,  
It's all no go, no go – a triple no.

## *Reading Keats on Holiday at a Rented Flat in Saltdean*

John Keats's letters  
have very few betters  
and they're full of occasional verse,  
so for holiday reading  
they were what I was needing –  
though they tell of the terrible curse

of Poetic Ambition  
(when you switch the ignition  
you expect to be able to start  
for a literary Glory –  
but that's not the whole story,  
Fame doesn't accompany Art

as her natural companion,  
there's a wide and deep canyon  
between what we want and we get  
Time's the critical sorter,  
if their name's writ in water  
the ambitious end up looking wet)

So it's best to go easy,  
for Saltdean is breezy,  
it's relaxing to lie in the sun,  
if the poetic peaks  
are reserved for the freaks,  
let them have them We still have our fun

There's a gnome in the garden,  
a young man gets a hard-on  
with a girl who is full of Romance  
Life goes on, ordinary,  
milk comes up from the dairy  
and a batsman's correcting his stance

That Traffic Warden  
hasn't heard of Auden;  
reading is only for schools.  
They wake up for the telly  
like the soldier's reveille –  
but they're not necessarily fools.

Though the Plain Man is sensual  
he lives well in that tense you all  
praise who think Sartre was the boy;  
and to live in the present  
can be very pleasant  
and well worth a few Odes to Joy.

The kids on the beaches  
are a lesson that teaches  
how our Foresight can spanner the works;  
*they* don't howl when with damp arts  
the sea makes their ramparts  
like the Parthenon after the Turks.

Even Arts that are greatest  
must survive, at the latest,  
as dead languages, part secondhand;  
if the sea is eternal  
we are annual (or journal)  
and the best of our life work is sand.

## Going To

Some say Peter Rabbit  
is buried in Père Lachaise,  
some men love operas  
in barking German,  
some sit up all night  
with a sick joke  
or fondle an LP –  
The Beauties of Beethoven

Some can write novels  
on sheets of sandpaper,  
some cannot bear  
the smell of bananas,  
some regard sex  
as an eight-pronged octopus,  
go out like a light  
when The Terror is mentioned

Some are so singular  
they can never be plural,  
live in their skins like  
the gnomes of the Aftermath,  
go underground  
with computer salesmen,  
at just one bad word  
can sulk for two years

Some are found wanting  
Eternity timewise,  
love their big appetites  
for personal relations,  
some have sparkling  
eyes for what's wholesome,  
some count the railings –  
might even get there

# The Screen

This is the land where Stalin, like something out of  
Disney,  
Snarls between clenched teeth: 'Get Trotsky!'

Where a paramour of Charles II smiles at him lightly,  
Winks, whispers 'I'm mad at you, Your Majesty!'

And Keats says 'Yes, we better had!' to Shelley,  
Wicked Cromwell has destroyed Oireland entoirely,

Robin Hood calls the Sheriff of Nottingham a heel,  
naturally,  
Ladies love outlaws and all the monks are jolly.

The further in time the more acceptable; but latterly,  
Where we *know* what they might have said, a bit silly –

Like Coghill trying to make Chaucer read easily.  
It stands like a wide screen between us and History.

*If*

If I ever came back (if we are speaking of impossibilities  
and revenants and Scholar Gipsies  
and belief in Time Travel and supernatural facilities)  
if by some sort of spiritual ellipsis  
my entire life could be compressed into one episode  
current between the anode and the cathode,

I would choose you to come back to – not in the inanities  
of a daily life spent as a reviewer  
but in a centre of learning, a place where the humanities  
are taught, though few and daily fewer  
those who would remember me in its venerable streets,  
while dons lecture on the language of Keats,

and I would meet you in a pub with a garden and  
the academic background wouldn't matter  
or the centuries in which undergraduate and ordinand  
in rough-walled quads trod the flat stones flatter,  
and for one hour we would talk, touch and look –  
by heart, and not according to the book

That pub still stands, where I celebrated my affinity  
with you, and its trade doesn't slacken,  
and the long line of lovers stretches to infinity  
in the bed-sitting-room and in the bracken,  
and in that walled courtyard with its trees  
you and I are the ghostly absentees



# *Found!*

*(McCall's, July 1969)*

Even protects you on your first day. Your worst day!  
(We took the inside out  
to show you how different it is.)

It flowers out. Fluffs out.

How to keep the most girl part of you  
fresh and free of any worry-making odors.

People who have had schizophrenia  
remain very sensitive.

Sharing their entertaining ideas and their recipes  
are these five Washington hostesses.

Everything from cheesecake to moose meat.

Wear it with two print-slashed scarves,  
tied one atop the other.

In a frozen dinner . . . only from Swanson.

## *The Dell*

My mother took us, when we went walking  
across Hyde Park, to the rural dell  
where wild rabbits occasioned excited talking  
and a kind of rustic enchantment fell,  
a woodland spell,

over our London whose traffic, roaring,  
was distanced there, but never odd  
did it seem to us that our spirit's soaring  
was at the command of a country god,  
and brock and tod

might too be hiding in that green hollow –  
this was our simple, childish thought  
Given the premise, conclusions follow  
That was the magic we found (and sought),  
as children ought

The great black rock that towered there only  
seemed unusual, out of place  
we never thought it, barbaric, lonely,  
hiding a dreamlike Freudian face,  
removed from Grace,

or primitive, such thoughts came later,  
with knowledge A darkly standing stone  
didn't disturb us, our joy was greater,  
though in a railed, forbidden zone  
it stood alone

Years, years after, in summer twilight,  
I stood there, before the dell, with you  
and the stone gleamed black with a lamplit highlight,  
and then and there, at once, I knew  
yes, what was true

That you, as rare as a four-leaf clover,  
wouldn't hurry now, as once, so gay,  
that, like my childhood, your love was over,  
the dell an excuse for one more delay  
on our homeward way

## *Experience Hotel*

The alcoholically inclined  
who live in this hotel  
are often stoned out of their mind  
and only ring the bell  
for bottles of that special kind  
they know and love so well.

The ladies in their mules and wraps  
who haunt the corridors  
are knowledgeable about Dutch caps  
and more discreet than whores  
though not so different perhaps  
behind their numbered doors.

The staff is neutral in all this  
and tired from too much work  
ignoring every pinch and kiss  
from drunks who slyly lurk  
to grope the matron and the miss  
and the Manhattan clerk.

## *Trafalgar Day, 1972*

All bathed and brindled like a brushed cat,  
with a slight hangover from a literary party  
(and what could be nicer than that?)

on the day that one-armed bandit finally bought it  
I celebrate your sixteenth birthday;  
Who (one could say) would have thought it,

when I was a neurotic sixteen at Wellington College,  
that I should ever be a girl's *father*,  
straining after poetry and carnal knowledge?

But there you are and here I am, and let it be believed  
it was during a broadcast performance  
of Mozart's *Idomeneo* that you were conceived

So the whirligig of time brings in his revenges  
(don't quote me on that one)  
and something as mystical as our lost Stonehenges

has added another link to the chain of being,  
making you real and believable,  
and believing is (believe me) rather like seeing,

as you get stuck into *Jude the Obscure*,  
in the gear of your generation,  
Hardy certainly thought that Tess was pure

and said so on the title page Though this is a concept  
and a word that doesn't apply  
much nowadays, and words themselves are inept

to transmit a person's quality, you've got a womanly  
feeling  
of the kind men often lack  
That's what makes women, mainly, so appealing,

and when the hawks gather round to bully a dove  
you'd be soft-hearted, and  
the emotion you inspire in me could, loosely, be called  
love

# *Fiction: The House Party*

Ambrose is an Old Etonian and he  
is terribly in love with a girl called Fluffy  
who has Lesbian tendencies and is very attracted  
to a sophisticated debutante called Angela Fondling  
who was once the mistress of old Lord Vintage.

Don and Vi come to stay at the Castle  
and neither of them know how looking-glasses aren't  
mirrors  
or what wines go best with fish or even how to  
handle a butter knife or talk about horses.  
Don makes a joke about being unstable.

Fluffy doesn't know where to look and Ambrose  
chokes on his claret. His Lordship is thinking  
about a certain incident in 1930  
when 'Filthy' Fynes-Pantlebury rode a bay gelding  
up the main staircase and into a bathroom.

Angela is writing a book about the middle classes,  
she keeps giving Don and Vi gin and depth interviews  
and trying like a mad thing to understand Bradford.  
Lady Vintage is pathetically faded  
but she loves a young criminal in London: Reg. Ratcock.

They sometimes meet in the afternoon, on Fridays,  
and smoke a lot of pot in the tenement basement.  
Ambrose is thinking of taking Holy Orders,  
he usually thinks of Fluffy as a very young choirboy.  
Vi wants to go to the loo but she's shy about asking.

Lord Vintage has vanished into several daydreams;  
he remembers well how Frank Fondling once shot a  
beater.

Don is getting very tired of gin. Vi wets her knickers.  
Fluffy says to Ambrose: 'But what is a chasuble?'  
And Angela keeps her tape-recorder running. . .

## *Fiction: A Message*

'My dear fellow!' said the great poet, putting his arm  
affably round Ponsonby's neck,  
'I respect your feelings for Gertrude I realize they have  
something to do with sec  
or secs or whatever they call it Of course in my little  
backwater I haven't moved with the times –  
just listen to the bells of St Josef – how I love those  
chimes'

Down below, the Austrian lake reflected his agonized  
incomprehension sleepily in the sun  
'I'm at the end of my tether!' cried Ponsonby 'But you –  
your race is nearly run –  
I look to you for a message I know that behind her  
spectacles she has the most beautiful eyes,  
I've heard her playing Chopin at midnight with rapt,  
adoring cries'

'These things are sent to try us' said Anzeiger 'You'll  
find something in Apollonius of Rhodes,  
or one of the Desert Fathers, that proves fairly  
conclusively that women are toads '  
'I've told myself so, yet I often have the most  
incomprehensible puzzling dreams  
I dream of the Kaiserhof, of milk churns, of chocolate  
creams

Sometimes I run into a dark wood of feathery soft  
perfumed aromatic trees  
or I'm sinking in unimaginable sweetness like honey,  
right up to my knees,  
or I see Gertrude waving from a cottage with a very  
attractive rose-circled door  
I'm wearing my Norfolk jacket and, I'm ashamed to say,  
nothing more'

'That sounds like the Flesh', pondered Anzeiger, fingering gently Ponsonby's fair curls.

'We know well that St Anthony was tempted in dreams by demons and dancing girls.

Though these apparitions, old fellow, seem so irrational, so disturbing, so unaccountably odd,

I think we can safely assume, in your case, they don't come from God.

Though, of course, He has been known to work in some really very mysterious ways.'

'But what shall I do?' cried Ponsonby. 'Offer it up. Just pray and give praise.

We'll take the pony and trap and go down on Sunday, dear boy, to Linz.

The Lord will lend a kindly ear to your account of your sins.'

They turned and walked towards the house, arm in arm.

The sun had nearly set.

As they approached the pretty garden, by the last dark sentinel pine trees they met

Gertrude in a light summer dress, confidently smiling, friendly and demure.

Ponsonby smiled back. He was above her. Of that he was now sure.

## *Fiction: The Definite Article*

What was the mood? Calm What was the  
weather? Rainy He crumbed the  
kitchen table with his hands, felt the  
caster sugar sandy on fingers, the  
milkblots wet Across the road the  
sign of the Blue Star Garage, the  
blue and white letters, showed The  
B and the S were obscured, the  
message LUE TAR, if he moved the  
extra foot or so one way the  
words became UE AR He called it the  
message of continued existence, the  
Great Affirmation, even the  
gateway had blocked the  
words for its own purpose This was the  
trumpeted identity, the

tall fact of heness, and the  
effect was to make him all the  
more lonely Each morning he woke with the  
cry 'Darling!', with the  
languid 'You made me stiff', the  
hangover of old love, the  
memory of big bosoms, the  
carbon copy of youth, the  
result of education Oh, the  
loneliness! Bland in the  
huge city, he meditated the  
others, they moved the  
legs and arms, they were the  
working clockwork models, the  
human scenery his eye walked past, the  
tribes perfected in the sign of 'the'



# *Consoler Toujours*

All bright love that strikes like lightening on our so-so lives  
is a bonus,  
like the honey bees are making in their secret hives  
and the onus  
to enjoy it is on us as decrepitude arrives,  
each Tithonus

remembering the years-ago girls clearly in his heart,  
not forgetting  
all those faces and those kisses, every sexual part,  
heavy petting,  
and each happy ending from a slow or frantic start,  
and its setting

-all those rooms that now hold others or are bulldozed down,  
flats and houses  
standing tall as ghosts and ghostly in a ghostly town.  
The mind drowns  
quietly on the beds and sofas, red, white, pink or brown.  
This arouses

old emotions, recollected in tranquillity.  
Thought's assizes  
try the case of W or beauties B and C,  
no disguises  
hide the naked A; as she is sleeping there so peacefully  
the sun rises. . .

Women count and hoard their lovers for the days ahead,  
single-bedding,  
long last hours in hospitals, know towards what bed  
they are heading  
and what bells will ring for them at that lonely dead  
last wedding;

theirs and ours, the lovely bodies end up in a mess  
or disgusting.  
Yet these are the hands that fumbled to undo a dress,  
young and trusting  
we gave sexual adoration, love and tenderness,  
June was busting  
out all over like a song (and that's a fairly old  
jazz song title)  
so let's remember that we had it – something gleamed like gold,  
very vital,  
something beautiful and better than time's creeping cold  
sad requital

## *To the Slow Drum*

Beat for Auden, Wystan Hugh!  
Solemn musics sound, where you  
keep funereal pace with Time,  
showing sorrow in a mime  
Measured steps go best with grief,  
fitting for our old belief  
hurry does not chime with Death,  
mourners mayn't be out of breath –  
dead ones lie in that sad state,  
doomed by tolling bells as 'late'

Muted trombones, fateful brass  
help the slow procession pass,  
black on black and grey on grey  
in the twilight of the day

Music moved him; it is fit  
we remember him by it.  
Talent such as his is rare  
and our singing branch is bare,  
where shall we find such an one  
now the feeling voice has done?

In the brilliance of his Art  
noble grace-notes held their part  
bringing harmonies as clear  
to the convoluted ear  
as the masters in their time,  
making flute and oboe rhyme,  
furnished for the sister Muse.  
Homage that we can't refuse  
we must pay to that true sound,  
though the singer's underground.

Beat, drum, in the colder night!  
If hysteric nuclear fright  
seize us, choking, by the throat,  
rabbits hypnotized by stoat,  
let this be a potent spell  
countering the ne'er-do-well  
childishness of martial Man;  
let these calm him – as they can –  
systems closed and so complete  
that aggression seems effete.

In that Never-Never-Land  
all we know and understand  
is that fantasy is fact,  
locked as in a sexual act  
two are seen to be as one,  
play is play and fun is fun.  
He could do it, let us swim  
in that pool designed by him,  
happily ourselves immerse  
in the medium of his verse.

All our sorrow, all our fuss,  
is entirely now for us,  
not for him; for he achieved  
more than many once believed  
could be in an anxious age –  
nervous eyes desert the page.  
Beat, then, as the clock-hands cross,  
dramatise our sense of loss,  
lights are down, here comes your cue –  
beat for Auden, Wylan Hugh!

## *The Odes*

*The numbered translations of the four Odes of Horace that follow were made on the principle that the word-order of the Latin should not on any account be changed. This gives effects that would not otherwise be obtainable in an English version, and perhaps restores some of the strangeness of a foreign language.*

### *The Odes: Book I, 37*

Now must be drunk, now with foot free  
struck the ground, now with Salarian  
to decorate the couch of the gods  
the time was banquets, comrades

before wicked to decant Caecuban  
from cellars ancestral, while for Capitol  
queen demented ruin  
sorrow and for Empire was scheming

contaminated with a flock of foul  
with disease men, everything wishfully  
hoping and with fortune sweet  
intoxicated. but lessened her rage

hardly one saved ship from the fire,  
and her mind drugged with Marcotic  
redirected to true terror  
Caesar from Italy, her fleeing

with oars pressing, the hawk like  
soft doves or hare the swift  
hunter on plains of snowy  
Haemonia, so could give to chains

the fatal monster; who more nobly  
to perish seeking nor womanly  
feared sword nor the wide  
with fleet fast sought again shores;

bold both fallen to gaze on kingdom  
with face serene, strong and rough  
to draw to her serpents, to dark  
with her body drink in the poison,

than deliberate death more ferocious,  
by savage Liburnians as it were scorning  
despoiled to be led in proud  
not a humble woman triumph.

## *The Odes: Book II, 14*

Alas fleeting, Postumus, Postumus,  
slide years nor piety delay  
to wrinkles and impending age  
will bring and to untamed death

no if three hundred however many go days,  
friend, you please unweeping  
Pluto by bulls, who thrice ample  
Geryon and Tityos with sad

contains wave, in truth by all,  
whoever of earth by spoil we thrive,  
it must be travelled, whether kings  
whether needy we shall be peasants

in vain of bloody Mars we shall lack  
and the broken of raucous waves Hadria,  
in vain through autumns harmful  
to bodies we shall dread Austrus

must be seen black with languid  
Cocytus flowing and of Danaus stock  
infamous and damned to long  
Sisyphus Aeolides labour

must be left earth and home and pleasing  
wife, nor of these which you tend trees  
you beyond hated cypresses  
any brief lord will follow

will take heir Caecuba worthier  
preserved with hundred keys and with wine  
will dye the floor proud,  
of pontiffs stronger than at feasts

## *The Odes: Book II, 20*

Not with worn nor weak shall I be carried  
wing biform through liquid air  
poet, nor on earth shall I stay  
longer, and the envy greater than

of the city I shall quit. not I of poor  
blood parents, not I whom *you* call,  
dearest Maecenas, shall die  
nor by Stygian shall be bound wave.

now now settle on legs rough  
skin, and white I am changed into bird  
above, and are born light  
on fingers and shoulders feathers.

now than Daedalean more famed Icarus  
I shall be seen of groaning on shores Bosphorus  
and of Syrtes Gaetulan singing  
a bird and on Hyperborean fields.

me Colchian and who hides fear  
of Marsa's cohort Dacian and furthest,  
will know Geloni, by me taught  
will learn Iberian and of Rhone the drinker.

far be with pointless threnodies  
and grief unseemly and complainings;  
restrain outcry and of the grave  
put aside the empty honours.

## *The Odes: Book III, 1*

Hate profane vulgar and ward off,  
favour with tongues songs not before  
heard of the Muses the priest  
to virgins and boys I sing

of kings to be feared in own flocks,  
kings of themselves empire is Jove's,  
famous for Gigantic triumph,  
all with an eyebrow moving

is that than man wider bounds  
woods with furrows, this one more noble  
comes down to Campus candidate,  
with morals this and better in fame

contends, to that one crowd of clients  
is greater with equal law Necessity  
draws lots for famous and low,  
every capacious moves the urn name

drawn sword to whom over impious  
neck hangs, not Siculan feastings  
sweet will bring forth smell,  
not of birds and of lyre song

sleep may bring back sleep of peasant  
smooth men not humble houses  
disdains and the shady bank,  
not by Zephyrs agitated Tempe

him desiring what enough is nor  
tumultuous disturbs sea  
nor savage of Arcturus falling  
impetus or of rising Haedus,



not of beaten by hail vineyard  
and farm lying, with tree now waters  
blaming, now burning fields  
stars, now winters wicked.

lessened fish the seas feel,  
thrown in piles rubble; here frequenting  
rough stones throws down contractor  
with slaves and lord of earth

bored: but Fear and Threats  
climb there where lord nor  
leaves bronze of trireme and  
behind horseman sits black Care.

but if the sad nor Phrygian stone  
nor of purples than star brighter  
comforts use of nor Falernian  
vine and Achaemenian spice,

why with enviable gates and in new  
sublime style should I build a mansion?  
why valley change Sabine  
for riches more burdening?

## *Sonnet: The Picture on the Packet*

I was once a Stupid among Cambridge Clevers  
and boys from my prep school are now Lords and Sirs;  
though not all seeds come up like the promise on the  
packet  
you can guess a lot from the unseen background.  
A boy is just a boy to the boys that know him.

A twit or a twerp or a weed, but a chauffeur  
is suggestive to the adult eye, a swimming pool  
or an MP for a father prepares you for something

So some step into affluence like a pair of trousers  
Others go down One woke from an illness  
and on being told he had inherited an ostrich farm  
gave up the ghost Went out like a light at twenty  
I was never heir to a golden future  
That's why I live by this uneasy writing

## *Sonnet: A Dream*

The feeling tone was one of lost love,  
bitter, as I woke with a cigar mouth,  
but, as Bing Crosby and others have said and  
sung, it's better, etc You can't lose love  
unless at one time, in some way, you had it  
As one grows older, one grows reconciled  
The names of the lost are at home in other beds  
with difficulties of their own Not including me

Dreams work with a kind of neat backslang  
Love could be evol, and the boy a yob  
The approved thing is to be in love with Efil,  
she's the girl you ought to fancy She  
is the warm abstraction books call positive  
I like her; but you couldn't call it love

## *Sonnet: Be Satisfied with What You Have*

You switch on the set and you don't get a picture as you sit waiting. Or your talent is directional, like a portable radio it must face the music or it fades. Don't worry. Such things happen to everybody. The blank canvas, the white sheet of paper stare back at the creators of masterpieces equally as at you. Too much facility can be just as destructive. There are examples.

Take a sexual parallel. Men with small members may doubt their abilities; but impotence can also disturb those whose assets are gigantic. The overlarge can be too big for women, love locked out. Be modest. The Muse has compassion. You will be able to rise to the occasion.

## *Sonnet: Doo Bist Dee Roo*

One of the South London power stations has a chimney at each corner and looks like King's College Chapel – which somebody once described as a sow lying on her back. Some love runs on bottles of cheap wine, like cars on petrol; clonking, it stalls to a sober end. There's a terrific amount of love in London, of all kinds and intensities, at every time and place.

Not so much has romantic or Gothic complexity, it's mainly now straightforward and utilitarian like a child's drawing of a complicated machine.

We talk of sexual loves – but there are others  
They don't inspire so much fascinating nonsense  
They're usually quieter, less talkative, more peaceful

### *Sonnet: Cat Logic*

Cat sentimentality is a human thing Cats  
are indifferent, their minds can't comprehend  
the concept 'I shall die', they just go on living  
Death is more foreign to their thought than  
to us the idea of a lime-green lobster That's  
why holding these warm containers of purring fur  
is poignant, that they just don't *know*  
Life is in them, like the brandy in the bottle

One morning a cat wakes up, and doesn't feel  
disposed to eat or wash or walk It doesn't panic  
or scream 'My last hour has come' It  
simply fades Cats never go grey at the edges  
like us, they don't even look old Peter Pans,  
insouciant No wonder people identify with cats

### *Sonnet: Cat Cruelty*

Our cat brings a mouse to the window and drops it  
It hobbles a few feet One leg is injured  
The cat in an excess of delicate energy  
dribbles it like a forward From now on  
there is only one tortuous path for it to follow,  
only one destination, and that one a dark one

The cat mouths it and walks off.  
They know how to maim and not to kill.

Cat Inquisition. Extraordinary questions.  
From those claws – only the dark destination.  
Urbain Grandier. Such things certainly  
would go near to make a man hate Life.  
For lunch I am eating a savoury stew;  
the small bones crunch in my mouth with disgust.

## *Sonnet: Nature*

Sssh! Don't move! Just look. A bullfinch  
has just jumped onto a forget-me-not. That's Nature,  
the way the Nature-lover sees it (though you needn't  
be tired of life to be very tired of London).  
It's an alternative society – those rocks and trees and  
birds.

But whatever occurs in nature is natural,  
natural men made moon-walkers. These metals are ours,  
from the earth's crust, a natural cooling loaf.

Birds, beasts and flowers have the beauty of finished  
things.

Everything's intricate and marvellous. But  
conservationists  
come very close to idolatry. And can we afford it?  
To worship some indifferent obsolescent warbler  
when the real hard case is burning up landscapes,  
the blockheaded violent ragtime cowboy – Man?

# *The First Eleven (1977)*

*These eleven poems were not included in the collection  
Be My Guest<sup>1</sup> for reasons of space and cost*

## *The Conventional Love Song*

I want to be the blue veins in your breasts,  
a small serrated knife handled by you,  
the bath water lying on your belly,  
a glass of red wine staining your tongue,  
a pair of your panties or an expensive bra,  
anything close or useful (love is so useless)

What *you* must want to be is simply you

## *Tourneur out of Touch*

I thought of how bad cooking murders meat,  
violates vegetables, penalises puddings  
With private poisons in a fingernail  
a cook can fumigate a family,  
clear the clean rooms and send them howling  
to beds as easeless as the turning spit  
He stabs them with sharp pains Or, rather, they  
use greedy knives and forks upon themselves,  
offensive weapons in the war of food,  
as each a Brutus runs upon his death

I thought of prisoned chickens in the cage,  
the Little-Ease of cluttered row on row,  
close calves drip-fed, that suffer  
hoof-rot. I thought of how  
10 cm. needles kill a man,  
pushed under the lobe of the right ear  
into the brain; a little speck of blood  
wiped off with surgical spirit. All unknown,  
a cerebral haemorrhage guessed  
in place of murder on the headlined town.

I thought of lustful crimes and love betrayed,  
of cryptic hangings and the colour black  
and in dark rooms the whistling of dark wings,  
masked movement, treachery. See how the  
curtain stirs and yet there is no wind!  
A breath of carnage; and the rot of war  
comes in conspiracy through centuries  
clotted with innocent blood. I see no change.  
The mirror sends back man's ambitious face  
pocked with police state cruelty and pride.

## *Orchestra*

Cellos are dark

creamy toffees

smooth on the tongue.

Oboes are

acid drops.

Drumbeats

pepper the score

clarinets

reed warblers

with a fat taste

Flutes come

ice-cold, clear

Violins

rush to the head,

white wine

Violas

liqueurs,

mild vermouths

Brass!

*all the harsh hot*

curries that stir us

Harps

drop

single

notes

like water in pastis

## *The Hut*

That is the hut where she used to work, and there  
under the paint-peeled corrugated iron  
with square small windows set in wooden frames  
by thumb and spatula she played the old Art games,  
under the moon now, far from bright Orion,  
in misty autumn, tenantless and bare



it stands so useless in the bleakly chilling air,  
    nettle-surrounded, a falling garden shed,  
and cobwebbed to the mean and spidered roof,  
sad as great Abbeys – for Time is so aloof,  
    indifferent to that life that once she led  
when she sat smoking in that single chair.

The canvases have gone. Some empty frames odd-piled,  
    African figures on the windowsill,  
witness the young Slade student of shared youth,  
paint-splashes hold a bitter kind of truth,  
    the easel stands at ease in empty drill.  
And with these things I must be reconciled.

The friends and sisters go; and all who had in that past smiled  
    (and some had beauty, some were bright with wit)  
must forfeit health and come to this one room  
as dark with memory as a Victorian tomb,  
    and we must wrestle with understanding it  
until from life and hope we are exiled.

## *Nightflight*

vampires

vempires

vimpires

vompires

vumpires

## *For Samuel Palmer*

The countryside is wet and cold  
The lambs are gathered in the fold  
Tax-dodgers run the funny farms  
The nightingale exerts its charms  
Those labourers are very thick  
The setting sun illumines the rick

Clods are dull clods and loam is loam  
Peace blesses ev'ry cottage home  
The rural rapes ride after dark  
Lightly ascends the twitt'ring lark  
Beer is expensive and not good  
Badgers play in the moonlit wood

Mindless Nature doesn't care  
Through fields of stubble runs the hare  
Village idiots are grotesque  
The humble cot is picturesque  
Most farming is a frantic fiddle  
Rustic life's a timeless idyll

# *Charles Augustus Milverton*

*see* The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Lady Eva Brackwell, the most lovely debutante  
of last  
season, will be married (and who dares say that she  
shan't?)

to the stern  
and mast-  
erly Earl of Dovercourt; a sensitive young plant  
in an urn,  
she fast,

yes, to his pure stiffness in a fortnight will be tied –  
but she

has dispatched imprudent letters, shaming to a bride,  
alas!

to the  
impecunious young squire who adorned her countryside –  
a class  
too free!

Oh, who's purloined those letters but Augustus  
Milverton?

and who  
's asking seven thousand pounds the lot, each sprightly  
one?

What can  
Holmes do?

Though he looks like Mr Pickwick, he's a fiend – and  
she's undone!

A man  
who knew

no compunction for his victims – a genius in his way –  
and he's  
much too fond of swollen money-bags, when victims  
pray –

smile, face,  
heart, freeze!

She'll be lucky if she falters out the word 'obey'  
This case,  
Holmes sees,

needs the most oblique approach impenetrable disguise

So he

becomes a gay young workman before Watson's very  
eyes –

clay pipe,  
goatee –

walking out with Hampstead housemaids (Watson  
shows surprise),

a type,  
you see,

quite above suspicion in the villain's servants' hall

Holmes plans

one last throw – a felony – to win or lose it all

This quite  
unmans

Watson 'Think what you are doing!' Anguished, manly  
call!

That night  
it pans

out well With a first-class burgling kit, a nickel plat-  
ed jemm-  
y, diamond-tipped glass cutter, and adjustable keys, late,  
with true  
native phlegm

they invade the silent house. The safe! but changeful Fate,  
like you,  
my fem-

inine reader! Holmes has barely time to seize his tools  
when HE  
enters. Quick! Behind the curtains! They will both look fools  
if caught –  
but how flee?

Milverton is not a man who plays the game by rules,  
his sport  
villainy.

Claret-coloured smoking jacket, big red leather chair,  
a long  
black cigar. Unknowingly he sits before them there  
unperturbed.

What's wrong?  
It's far past his usual bedtime. Does he gloat on fair  
disturbed  
belles, a Mong-

olian idiot's grin upon his round blackmailer's face?  
The door!

Gentle rustle of a woman's dress. Ah, what disgrace  
could bring  
her before

this insufferable bounder, seated there so base,  
a thing  
beyond law?

It's a lady in a mantle, veiled and lithe and tall!  
'It is I.'

Handsome, clear-cut face, curved nose, dark eyebrow  
shading all  
the hard  
glittering eye.

straight the thin-lipped mouth set in a dangerous and  
small  
smile. Guard  
thyself! Fly!

Milverton, however, laughs 'Ah, you were obstinate.'

'And you  
sent the letters to my husband, to my noble mate,  
a man  
so true

I was never worthy yet to lace his boots! In hate  
he ran  
quite through

grief's whole bitter gamut till it broke his gallant heart  
He died

'Don't imagine you can bully me!' Her thin lips part,  
white hand  
inside,  
buried in her bosom Uncontrolled the wild fears start,  
unplanned,  
to slide

into Milverton's cold, scheming, brilliant, worldly  
brain,  
so clever

'You will never wring a woman's innocent heart again,  
you will  
never  
ruin lives as you ruined mine, to cause such countless  
pain,  
to kill,  
or ever

boast of those disasters that it was your trade to bring  
to our  
gentle sex Take that, you hound! Take that, you  
poisonous thing!

Oh, stare!

Oh, cower!

See the little gleaming pistol emptied in the ting-  
ling air!  
Her hour,

joyfully she takes revenge! 'You've done me ' Still he lies  
Intent,

she grinds a fashionable heel into the upturned eyes.

Night air,  
passion spent,  
the fair avenger leaves the room to Holmes and Watson,  
spies  
who share  
secrets meant

for no one but that Justice who must still protect the  
weak.

Oh, quick!  
open safe and burn the letters, excitement at its peak!  
Escape  
in the nick  
of time and run two miles, no breath or even need to  
speak,  
dim shape  
s night-thick!

Solemn in the morning Baker Streetwards comes  
Lestrade  
with news  
of most unusual murder, masked marauders; seeks their  
aid.

Holmes says  
'I refuse'.  
Later, though, in Oxford Street they see the photo of a  
lad-  
y, gaze  
and muse. . .

Beauty with a bright tiara on her noble head,  
regal,  
stately, Court-robed lady, eyebrows strongly marked,  
well-bred,  
nose curve  
of eagle.  
Could time-honoured titles shoot a fellow mortal dead  
or swerve  
to the illegal?

## *The Clarissa Harlowe Poem*

Down then, thou rogue thou, red three-cornered varlet,  
and hammer not within my breast so fast!  
We rakes appreciate a sin so scarlet,  
the dear indifferent's trials are not yet past,  
she labours under a father's heavy curse  
but yet must love me better – or fare worse

I offered to salute the lovely fair one,  
her teasing letters hidden in her stays  
The charming icicle refused Oh, dare one  
not carry her abroad, to Church or plays?  
But you was, Lovelace, by her female scorn  
then made to doubt she was a woman born,

an angel rather! 'Sir', she cried, 'unhand me!'  
when I upraised the covering handkerchief  
It is impossible she should understand me,  
or how I glory in her silent grief,  
but more when she lets loose her sparkling tears,  
prudent and virtuous, though eighteen years –

no more – she has Yet with her piercing eye-beams  
could regulate the *mother* and the *house*,  
as the bright sun within a cloudy sky beams  
she ruled my bad companions Yet a mouse  
she is, and Lovelace is the cat,  
though devil fetch me if I ever sat

so mute before a prouder, haughtier beauty!  
Still all I hear is 'Wretch!', 'Dissembler!', 'Vile!',  
so conscious of her virtue and her duty,  
so over-nice! The condescending smile  
I work for always – it eludes me still,  
and she falls into fits, indeed she's ill!



The sex, I know, admires a bold encroacher,  
at heart the finest ladies love a rake,  
and I have always been the devil's poacher  
with such fair game. Where then was my mistake?  
She loves me, I conceive, but why so prim?  
Why calls she so incessantly on Him?

Why loves she so her friend, that pert virago?  
Why hates my *morals* – since I may repent?  
Scarce from her closet stirs and eyed like Argo  
guarding her honour will not once relent?  
She throws Miss Bettinson at my 'scheming' head,  
with other fair ones long since brought to bed.

I toil and toil, I plot with my expedients.  
She's sullen still, and all I have – her hate!  
But I will force her to a close obedience  
and she shall own a Lovelace for her mate!  
I'll be revenged, and she'll come at my call.  
Catching such birds is all, and more than all –

she'll learn to come, and end her prudish blushing,  
I'll crook my little finger from the bed.  
Freedoms are innocent, and the *last*, a rushing  
wide torrent from the mountain's awful head –  
which once, a puny stream, scarce wet the stone!  
And when that day comes, I'll not lie alone.

## *From a Well-Wisher*

That little poem  
you were eyeing in the bar last night,  
why don't you knock her off?  
Pull her panties down,  
investigate her rhythms,  
be familiar with her rhyming scheme?

She certainly gave you  
the encouragement of a Come on look,  
I think she means  
to get you into print,  
she would like to be published  
But be careful how you handle  
her punctuation

Sometimes they're flirts  
and some don't really mean it  
but personally I think  
she fancies you  
Her nipples had a hard accusing look  
that spoke slim volumes  
Get her down on paper,  
lay her on a single sheet

## *Vacancy*

Fresh at the interview  
he turned out well –  
there was no fumbling  
under the table

Without probing  
he answered their questions,  
he was so numerate,  
ran round the circuits.  
He was twit-handed,  
they loved his profile,  
his name in Cakeland  
was Butterfingers.  
Sat so straight in  
a lilac topcoat,  
his boots so polished  
they gave you eyeglare.  
His monocle made them  
feel beastly rotters,  
his voice was simply  
miles above them.  
His vowels astounded –  
can you blame them,  
they hadn't the courage  
to give him the job?

## *Venus*

A goddess has just checked out and  
left no forwarding address. She won't be back.  
She got so bored with waiting. For so many years  
you spoke of her slightly.  
Telephone calls. The unshared drinks at six.  
She took in movies, slept late. Oh, yes  
she knew you, expected you.

If she was lying in a bath relaxing  
and fingering the soap as goddesses do  
she was certainly working out an alias  
We only know them under other names  
They change As the light falls on a building,  
changing it Perhaps she even  
had a name for *you*?

Long lunches, scented bedrooms, cold trays  
with hot coffee and perhaps an egg  
She had the life of an émigrée, the small  
dictatorial smile for room service,  
kept clean, kept beautiful  
But now she's gone You won't see her  
again or ever It's an empty room

# *No Fool like an Old Fool* (1976)

## *An Extended Apostrophe to John Hatch Clark, a Comrade Both Ancient and Modern*

Dear CLARK, the Name on which I build,  
My Shield and Hiding Place,  
Whose Promise was not unfulfill'd,  
Intelligence and Grace

Abounding greatly even then  
In Nineteen-Thirty-Five  
When in your Sojourn among Men  
I first saw you alive,

The Master of the Cricket Bat,  
The Cut and Legside Flick,  
Adorn'd by Scholar's Gown and Hat –  
As by a double Wick

You burn'd the Candle at both Ends,  
With Sport and Intellect  
Astonishing your many Friends  
Of ev'ry Creed and Sect,

Fair OXFORD's ambidext'rous Pride,  
In each Hand a fair Torch  
The Way t'illuminate, and guide  
With Flame that would not scorch

But show a calm and mod'rate Light  
Upon the Way Ahead  
To that imagin'd distant bright  
Pavilion of the Dead,

Where those who gain a First in Greats,  
And those who score the Goals,  
Alike submit to those three Fates,  
While those who frisked like Foals

Lie down at last t'Eternal Rest  
And, feeling rather tired,  
We too shall sleep, O brave and best,  
O CLARK, my much-admired!

*Professor Otto Lidenbrock\* to  
Wystan Hugh Auden*

*(as of 29 September 1974)*

You were a rare one indeed –  
in crabbed Runic letters from Iceland  
you put your message across

early, when Terror abroad  
demanded the bardic responses  
Arne Saknussem alas!

with his alchemical lore  
could never have flummoxed the Axis,  
Snorro Turleson too once

wrote of the foreigner's rule,  
a country so banjaxed by Norway  
Gehlenites, fangasites still

(walking-on parts, without speech)  
and our titanite of zirconium,  
minerals both of us loved,

\* In Jules Verne's *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* (1864),  
Professor Lidenbrock is the Leader of the expedition

neutral, embellish the stage.  
That's why we now hold them, inhuman,  
in unregenerate hands;

*we* change much faster than they,  
and people have called rocks eternal.  
You, by one year, are diffuse.

I saw the light of my day  
one hundred and ten years ago now,  
yes, quite eccentric and odd,

much given to anger; they said  
my sharp nose attracted iron filings –  
students don't have much respect.

Diesel and Daimler and Benz  
by no means had caused the commotion  
later you found so ungay –

skies were for poets and birds,  
our roads weren't as straight but quite fumeless,  
beam engines still were around.

That was the so-simple scene  
that one could call Middle Industrial.  
You'd have been happy, I know,

in that mechanical peace  
before we had jet-lag and nylon.  
Odd you most certainly were,

not one to welcome the brash  
insensitive probe of the bedroom;  
I was a funny one too.

Liking to think that we share  
a true geological mania,  
comrade, I send you my peace!

## A Double View

*'If you will but speak the word, I will make you a good syllabub  
of new verjuice and then you may sit down in a haycock, and  
eat it, and Maudlin shall sit by and sing you the good old song of  
the "Hunting in Chevy Chase"'*

ISAAK WALTON, *The Compleat Angler*, 1652

*'I only want men with really enormous pricks – nine inches and  
more Just imagine what I could do to a prick that long! I  
could lash it to a miniature whipping post and then flagellate it  
with tiny, jewel-handled whips'*

JOAN C, Sunderland Letter in *Club International*, 1974

Relax Don't get high blood pressure  
for rural or Merrie England  
There are many different kinds of pleasure,  
they could even mingle and  
be none the worse,  
nor is one really the reverse

of the other Bees are humming,  
all right, in the warm heather  
but you've got another think coming  
if you think that was altogether  
a Golden Age,  
Civil War was all the rage

when Walton put Piscator in this idyll,  
and whipping posts were real,  
witnesses tortured, in the very middle  
of a century ideal  
only to us,  
who make sentimental fuss

about the Past (past enough, and done with,  
we love it!) A good time is  
the choice of whom or what you have fun with,



for example, Yanks and Limeys  
might not agree.  
In the year 1653,

when Cromwell was proclaimed Lord Protector,  
a man like staunch Venator,  
if you got at him with a lie detector,  
would be found a masturbator  
as like as not;  
only the very greatest clot

thinks that the fantasy worlds are wicked  
(the staff might write the letters?),  
mild sadomasochism isn't cricket.  
Elders aren't always betters –  
and an excuse  
for *not* eating verjuice

(such a dreamy word) would be most necessary –  
since unripe grapes/apples were ingredients.  
Also, the letter-writer's accessory  
jewel-handled whips are expedients  
full of style;  
imagination! better by a mile

than the rack, and the crude pressing  
to death that was actual.  
Rustic peace seems window-dressing.  
Though, if we're being factual,  
it appears  
we've not changed much in three hundred years.

# The Theory of the Leisure Class

In those huge Victorian novels that were written during the time when Tennyson was occupied with *Marianas* and *Mauds*

people were saying things like 'What do you think, my dear sir, in general, of pious frauds?'

and the language was pompous in the extreme and you might guess they one and all were as cold-blooded as saurians,

though we know now they all had Secret Lives and were having a high old time with those Other Victorians

There were *malades imaginaires* and interesting invalids and ladies with permanently weakened constitutions, while the rough gin-drinking populace starved or enjoyed themselves at public executions

The ambition of the wealthy was, quite seriously, to do absolutely nothing but to drink, to ride, to dance, to flirt

Gambling for high stakes, soldiering, politics, the buying of a new horse or a new skirt

These were the only approved interests Making money was trade It must have been very gentlemanly but boring,

especially for the ladies, who weren't allowed – like their husbands and boy friends – to go off whoring

Governesses suffered most They had to be well-behaved examples and quite preternaturally respectable

They couldn't get drunk or encourage (or satisfy the desires of) men, however delectable

In a hundred years or so we've changed, with our haircuts and our democratic adolescents in classless clothes,

though those with the wealth don't show many signs of  
being terribly different from those  
whose motto (What We Have We Hold) they held – as Mr  
Mantalini might say – 'like some deind vempire',  
and our commercial predominance hasn't survived  
two wars and the disposal of an Empire.

Almost every class now is a leisure class, occupied (as it  
might be) with The Who, The Beatles or Bingo,  
turned on by the telly, passively entertained by electronic  
football, Ken Russell, Ringo.

It all makes one think of bread and circuses, of those  
century-gone lives idle and under a blight;  
how William Morris, who wanted handicrafts instead of  
machines, might very well have been right.

## *Incident, Second World War*

*(In Memoriam P. M. B. Matson)*

It was near the beginning of that war. 1940 or '41,  
when everything was fairly new to almost everyone.  
The bombing of cities we understood, and blackouts;  
and certainly, thanks

to the German Army and Air Force, we'd seen  
dive-bombers and tanks.

But when the fighters came in to strafe with  
hedge-hopping low attacks

how many bits and pieces would be picked up to fill the  
sacks?

Aircraft cannon were not much fun for the weary  
grounded troops

and there wasn't much entertainment when the Stukas  
were looping loops

but nobody knew for certain the percentage who  
wouldn't get up,  
how many would be donating their arms or their legs to  
Krupp  
So somebody in an office had the very bright idea,  
why not set up an Exercise machine-gunning from the  
air?  
The War Office would know exactly the kind of figures  
involved,  
an exciting statistical problem could be regarded as  
solved

In a field, they put khaki dummies, on the reverse side of  
a hill  
And afterwards, they reckoned, they could estimate the  
kill  
Opposite these was the audience, to watch the total  
effect,  
a sort of firework display – but free – the R A F being the  
architect  
All arms were represented? I think so A grandstand seat  
was reserved for top brass and others, a healthy open-air  
treat;  
enclosed, beyond the dummies, they stood (or sat?) and  
smoked  
or otherwise passed the time of day, relaxed as they  
talked and joked

An experienced Spitfire pilot was briefed to fly over low  
and give those dummies all he'd got – the star turn of the  
show,  
with all the verisimilitude of a surprise attack  
Then to his fighter station he would whizz round and  
back  
They waited And suddenly, waiting, they saw that  
angel of death  
come at them over the hillside Before they could draw  
breath  
he passed with all guns firing; some fell on their faces,  
flat,  
but the benefit was minimal that anyone had from that

He reckoned that *they* were the dummies, in his  
slap-happy lone-wolf way,  
that trigger-crazy pilot. He might have been right, some  
say.

But bitterness and flippancy don't compensate for men's  
lives  
and official notifications posted to mothers and wives.

Nevertheless, there *were* results; percentages were  
worked out,  
how 10 per cent could be written off, the wounded  
would be about  
50 per cent or so. Oh yes, they got their figures all right.  
Circulated to units. So at least that ill-omened flight  
was a part of the Allied war effort, and on the credit side—  
except for those poor buggers who just stood there and  
died.

## *Ending*

The love we thought would never stop  
now cools like a congealing chop.  
The kisses that were hot as curry  
are bird-pecks taken in a hurry.  
The hands that held electric charges  
now lie inert as four moored barges.  
The feet that ran to meet a date  
are running slow and running late.  
The eyes that shone and seldom shut  
are victims of a power cut.  
The parts that then transmitted joy  
are now reserved and cold and coy.  
Romance, expected once to stay,  
has left a note saying GONE AWAY.

## *Rain – No Play*

*Poem written instead of going to Lord's (a famous cricket ground)*

Some tall and typical English Awfuls  
were flowering outside the Royal Academy  
buttonholed in the suits of tailors,  
male and female and like stick insects,  
from the top of a surging bus I saw them  
in a sort of Vision of Piers the Plowman

Well-turned-out were the waisted women,  
of the kind that once at cocktail parties  
wore hats and gloves and sipped their sherry,  
the men were wonderful in their waistcoats  
A Summer Exhibition they themselves were,  
as perfumed and orderly as an English garden

Lords and Ladies of a small Creation,  
noteworthy for having lots of money,  
there they stood in the grey May weather  
with cigarettes in 'amusing' holders  
reminding of the Twenties, their bygone heyday –  
and made intellectuals feel self-righteous

Such people still in a sense are powerful  
(some are witty and many charming),  
wealth and property must still be reckoned with  
in this very beautiful backward country  
which one wouldn't swap for regimes of Europe  
or the picturesqueness of all the peasants

Though they don't like Art, these took the trouble  
at least to look at those daubs, official  
representatives of a past Old Order –  
they don't reckon Art much in the Buildings,  
it squeezes in sideways on the telly  
Philistia has a classless society

Patronage was part of that once tradition,  
we should never forget what we owe to idiots  
who provided cash for the private building –  
and not all, naturally, were all that silly  
though their descendants look a bit blighted  
planted out in this other Eden.

They wander now like the dead in Homer,  
pallid ghosts who once were warriors,  
still follow patterns, the prides of prep schools,  
but as a class they are on their uppers  
in a Britain that has heard of social justice  
like a dark rumour in black-suited boardrooms.

The rain streams down, and the vision's fading.  
Who will understand this precarious phenomenon  
(in a London where, like Mother Church, stood  
Harrods,  
centre of pilgrimage) in another century?  
The cricket fields are stretched out green and useless,  
they too survivals of a Past not perfect.

## *Poets*

It isn't a very big cake,  
some of us won't get a slice,  
and that, make no mistake,  
can make us not very nice  
to one and all – or another  
poetical sister or brother.

We all want total praise  
for every word we write,  
not for a singular phrase,  
we're ready to turn and bite  
the *thick* malicious reviewers,  
our hated and feared pursuers

We feel a sad neglect  
when people don't buy our books,  
it isn't what we expect  
and gives rise to dirty looks  
at a public whose addiction  
is mainly romantic fiction

We think there's something wrong  
with poets that readers *read*,  
disdaining our soulful song  
for some pretentious screed  
or poems pure and simple  
as beauty's deluding dimple

We can't imagine how  
portentous nonsense by A  
is loved like a sacred cow,  
while dons are carried away  
by B's more rustic stanzas  
and C's banal bonanzas

We have our minority view  
and a sort of trust in Time,  
meanwhile in this human zoo  
we wander free, or rhyme,  
our admirers not very many –  
lucky, perhaps, to have any



## *Yorkshiremen in Pub Gardens*

As they sit there, happily drinking,  
their strokes, cancers and so forth are not in their minds.

Indeed, what earthly good would thinking  
about the future (which is Death) do? Each summer finds  
beer in their hands in big pint glasses.

And so their leisure passes.

Perhaps the older ones allow some inkling  
into their thoughts. Being hauled, as a kid, upstairs to bed  
screaming for a teddy or a tinkling  
musical box, against their will. Each Joe or Fred  
wants longer with the life and lasses.

And so their time passes.

Second childhood; and 'Come in, number eighty!' shouts inexorably the man in charge of the boating pool.

When you're called you must go, matey,  
so don't complain, keep it all calm and cool,  
there's masses of time yet, masses, masses . . .

And so their life passes.

## *Adolescent Agonies*

Though my potential is enormous  
examinations give me traumas,  
and women with their little pee-things,  
chattering among the tea things.

Self, oh, self! Oh, thou that kissest  
the upturned face of this narcissist!

All my thoughts, directed mewards,  
miss the glories that lie seawards,

my psyche is in such a panic  
I can't start feeling oceanic

Venus with her pouting bust is  
no consoler for injustice,  
everywhere the poor are treated  
like phrases that must be deleted  
It makes me feel I'm going barmy  
to see how often it's an Army  
that rules the young illiberal countries  
O Diana, Queen and Huntress,  
moonlike maid with circling crescent,  
have pity on this adolescent!

We are nothing, we are zeros,  
completely in the power of Eros,  
here to-day and gone to-morrow,  
in a vale of tears and sorrow,  
in a time of crime and crisis  
licking lollies, eating ices  
When the social groups first started  
were men even then cold-hearted?  
Did we never care for others?  
What's that archaic word now? 'Brothers'?

I reject what admen taught us,  
I reject the plays of Plautus,  
classical and other studies,  
the conmen and the fuddy-duddies  
Both are very far from noble  
My distress is yours – and global  
I am Man, not very happy  
in the nightie or the nappy,  
not enjoying his sins and sexes,  
husbands, wives or sorrowing exes

You can't ignore my wounded feelings  
in your Exeters and Ealings,  
mine is trouble that surpasses  
differences of clocks and classes,

though you are completely gormless  
and your life is calm and stormless,  
hire purchase mortgage man, flat-renter,  
I live at the stormy centre.  
I am in that sad condition:  
permanently in transition.

## *Yeats and Shakespeare*

Somebody wrote somewhere (about Yeats)  
how even in those wasp-waisted days  
before the First World War  
(for twenty years reckoned among the Greats)  
he was so spoiled by worship and by praise  
he couldn't behave naturally any more,

as hostesses crept up behind his back  
with every kind of social, sexual net  
and pecking order snare;  
a lion with hyenas on his track  
or hunters closing in, they say, and yet  
he never seemed to find this hard to bear.

Shakespeare was not so honoured in his life  
though (for a player) he ended rich,  
great ladies didn't swoon  
to hear or see him; and a bitter wife,  
it is presumed, told him the what and which  
of all his faults, and told him pretty soon.

Arnold was John the Baptist, coming late  
to smooth the way for universal awe,  
but one thing he got right:  
Shakespeare was lucky not to be thought great  
outside the Mermaid, or above the law.  
It's best for geniuses to travel light.

# *The Argument for the Benevolent God*

Suppose a sadist,  
after keeping a most beautiful woman in strict bondage  
for a year, with occasional beatings and other indignities,  
living shall we say in some decadent Egypt, Durrellian  
and impure, suppose he at the end of this time caused her  
to be locked into a special appliance, a mummiform case  
of stainless steel, exactly tailored to her mouth-watering  
measurements, with a headpiece like a mask worn by  
fencers, allowing her to see, hear and speak – but not to  
move. Suppose only from this smooth impervious steel  
casing her two well-nourished breasts, like soft hills, prot-  
ruded, pink and unprotected. Suppose then this sadist  
caused her to be transported deep into lion country and,  
in spite of her weeping, while the lazy sly attendants  
pinched her nipples, left her there, while he watched  
from a luxurious hide, drinking Johnnie Walker, until a  
big brazen lion happened along, his great yellow balls  
like puffballs at the point of bursting, sniffed, cautiously  
approached and pawed her, screaming. Suppose finally  
he tore the breasts and bit them, ate them down as far as  
his muzzle allowed, blood on stainless steel,  
murder and mayhem

Suppose a deity,  
after making as the legends claim a delectable woman  
from the hard rib of a man, but making her soft and  
nubile and adapted to child-bearing, and after the love  
affairs and the kissing, the raising of skirts and the sexual  
adoration, in trains, on kitchen tables, in borrowed flats,  
in cornfields, in woodlands full of rabbits, if after all this  
sincere worship of the spirit of Procreation, he allowed  
procreation itself and probably marriage, the infants pul-  
ling at the very much publicised breasts, pink and unpro-  
tected. Suppose, with the children in their teens or  
entirely grown up, the woman still attractive found in  
one breast a small lump, which was excised as a cancer.  
Suppose there was radiation treatment but suppose just

suppose that this deity arranged it so that the cancer reached the bloodstream and appeared (perhaps within a year) somewhere on the back perhaps or the base of the spine, and after all the depression and discomfort of the radiation, the tiredness and the hopelessness, she sank into a long death, sedated in a silent scream, oblivion washing over her, far from lion country but martyred by motherhood. . .

## *Last Movements*

In Old Master music in sonata form,  
by Mozart, by Schubert, you always find,  
after the sadness and the emotional storm  
that moves or maddens the listening mind,  
strumming the nerves like the strings they play,  
that four, five or six will make the mood gay.

This is a convention, we know, of course,  
and a wistfulness in the rumti-ti-tum  
might be detected; the sorrow's force  
gives way to the logical musical sum,  
as vigorously, brightly, the players bend  
to a dance where unhappiness comes to an end.

But perhaps there's thanksgiving concealed there too  
for a life that also contained some joy,  
a kind of reminder for me and you  
that nothing's pure, and without alloy  
nothing. The dark swallows up despair  
as well as hope – says that rustic air.

# *Swarm Over, Death!*

*(Janmce Porter Slough Crematorium 20 December 1974)*

The planes are roaring at Heathrow  
like lions at a zoo,  
above Stoke Poges, near and low,  
whose churchyard holds a clue  
to what it is we still don't know  
and what we have to do

Under the warm and leafless bough  
of this pre-winter time  
we zero in to dismal Slough  
as witness to a crime –  
departure from our here and now  
of one no wit or rhyme

can possibly in joy recall  
from that uncharted state  
If God's responsible for all  
(unless you call him Fate)  
he seems revengeful for that Fall  
and neither soon nor late

his crematoria give up,  
consolatory, a ghost  
Bitter for kids, a Kiddie Kup  
prepared, like flaming toast,  
a sudden flare, a quick kerflup!  
mums vanish At the most

hygienic, I suppose you'd say,  
but for survivors sad,  
who don't forget a better day  
when Friendship made them glad,  
Love and Affection came to stay  
and a good time was had

by one and all. The words seem trite,  
like brandnames, not inspired,  
like golf balls simply called Kro-Flite  
(imagination tired)  
or Samuel watches: Ever-rite.  
We are not lit or fired

by any mystic inner glow.  
We envy, everywhere,  
the animals who just don't know  
or, if they know, don't care –  
who go because they have to go  
in face of Death's blank stare.

If all's ordained, as some will say,  
(we start the little cars  
and in our groups we drive away)  
by God or by our stars,  
it isn't very fair or gay  
or arguable in bars.

## *Looking for Books*

In even the best library, looking through the poetry  
shelves  
is a depressing experience for poets;  
they might not expect to find *themselves*

but they don't find many of their contemporaries either.  
Instead of MacBeth and Porter – Mrs Wilson.  
Slim volumes act elusive, hard to catch, litter

than lizards and the big fat books of critics  
whose size and weight can often stun us.  
Like aphasiacs or mental paralytics

Tennyson, *The Critical Heritage* by John D Jump  
knocks us out by just its title,  
*The Poems and Translations of Thomas Stanley* ed  
G M Crump

promises oceans of the greatest learned boredom  
(unless the ridiculous names mislead us)  
With these the Muse has not committed whoredom,

we suspect; they're innocent of her as Big Ears, Noddy  
or Aneurin Talfan Davies,  
author of *Dylan – Druid of the Broken Body*

And, in general, Heavy Verse tends to come out on top,  
serious *Crows*, the loud mystique of  
self-congratulatory suicide Light Verse must have a  
stop,

it seems, and only a continuous shrill hysteria  
vary the pieces on voles and  
large and small animals, the harebells, the wistaria

and every local landscape of the regional chauvinist  
Sad it may be, but one could say that  
a fit epitaph ('They'll none of them be missed')

is already pronounced, and frailly Stevie Smith  
resists Time with one *Selected Poems*  
The runaway actual factual leaves the myth

('Stevie Smith Oh yes, I like *him*!' a big beard said  
gauche to me once at a poetry reading),  
we are not even remembered, let alone read



# *The Return of the Hero*

He overclomb cliffs in that far country  
With wolves and with water mains he fought so freely  
In briars and badgerdoms he rabbited rebels  
Swooningly swimming the turnable tidesmarks  
Incredible crows cratered the causeway  
Dark were the doorways with feral foxes  
Energetic enemies falsified his feebleness  
Firm amid fire alarms he prevented panic  
Dragons and discotheques peacefully pacified  
In supermarkets he limited looting  
For his high heroics the ladies were lusting  
No one had seen such baronial beauty

Before

His body was seemly and straight,  
His height was as high as a door,  
Waiting women couldn't wait,  
They were asking for more.

Back from the beastliness in haste he hurried  
Never so knowingly chroniclers charted him  
Hazards of hell on a fiery field  
Gaping gestapos ominously overtured  
To borderline cases he brought early warning  
Charmingly championed the softer sexes  
In testified triumph great bronze bells beat  
Trumpets like tramlines blazed in beaconry  
Voices avowed him charisma in chorus  
In festive fountains wine was wobbling  
The boldest beauties kowtowed with kissing  
Opened their opulence with liking unlimited  
By thought.

This was instinctive as praise,  
No one could say it was bought,  
They offered it all in a phrase,  
And more than they ought.

Yet he, no knave, as a good knight should  
Was shunning their sherry in crystal cups  
Frowning at fathers brandishing brandy  
Slow to sly hints from matchmaking mothers  
Edging his eyes round the bountiful bosoms  
Never noticing nubile necks  
Counting as nothing their see-through somethings  
Solidly sober among the amphetamines  
Decidedly derisive of their deliberate dancing  
Regarding all praise as pitiful prize money  
And the randy rewards of righteous restlessness  
Not worth a worm-cast and simply silly  
Or trite

He kept his nose clean, you see,  
He never refused out of fright,  
He knew that, on land as on sea,  
A wrong can't be right

So did they sententiously serenade his seemliness?  
Praise his purity in post-prandial prose?  
Statue his stateliness in exquisite squares?  
Nibbling nasties on the contrary  
Combined to erode his reputation  
Hunting at horrors of hired holography  
Monsters mastered by fallacious fixing  
Elevated to epidemics an only outbreak  
Clouted and cloven cardboard animals  
Vintage volcanoes firecracker falsies  
No eager activity but lazy legend  
His asexual exploits rendered as rat-poison  
Not good

The moral is simple and sad  
The monk doesn't make the hood,  
You're never untouched by what's bad  
Or out of the wood

## *The One-time Three-Quarter Remembers the Past*

Pulling on a clammy jersey from a prep school locker  
and the boots with dry earth caked round leather studs  
and after a defeat to hear the bitter précis  
of the mad and shell-shocked master.

This was the game that I found more fun than soccer  
and a bright day meant good running, with the ball  
easy to handle, neither wet nor greasy;  
wind distracting, mud disaster.

We came after a war where the terrifying word Fokker  
embodied something as beastly as the opposing teams  
we hated and feared; now we walk slowly,  
it is time that moves much faster.

So on a bright morning we know, though age is a  
mockery,  
that the afternoon's International will be played fast;  
we run now in our minds only,  
old chairs, with one loose caster.

## *The Last Journey*

Old family cars have a certain appeal.  
Families get fond of them. Cartoonists  
love to draw them with big round eyes.  
Also, of course, in a way they are monsters –  
like other pets, dogs in particular, they are polluters,  
fuming up the high streets. They kill people.

All cars, too, are rooms on wheels, and have witnessed  
acts of love, arguments, affectionate banter,  
the behaviour of children Like animals, like us,  
they deteriorate with time The earth renews  
but they do not renew A licence in April  
brings no bright resurgence of power and beauty

If you've been fond of one, it's hard to think of it  
chained with battered others on the big transporter,  
cracked windows, dented like a toy  
by a termagant two-year-old, the words Old Faithful  
come to mind to remind of the so many journeys  
Turner felt the same about the Fighting Téméraire

## *The Second Coming*

I say the Sphinx was the Boston Strangler;  
and He will be born again in Oklahoma  
(I shall wear the feathers of the blue crane,  
which are the mark of a great warrior)  
and all over the campus the boys in sneakers  
will do him peculiar acts of homage,  
not forgetting the earlier avatar

A sign will be seen in Anne Hathaway's cottage  
As I walked through the wilderness of this world  
I knew He would be hatched from a hen's egg  
with a preference for soils that are argillaceous  
and a liking for hominy grits and grapefruit  
I put on pride as a kind of humbleness  
to announce a new wonder among the libraries

I shall purify myself in a kraal or igloo,  
refusing the offered breasts of the women,  
it's all in the small print in my contract,  
microfilmed on my brain; and His Word is sacred.  
On the third day I shall emerge to testify  
a miraculous birth, for the Muse a boyfriend  
and for us a new speech and a life-enhanced language.

## *The Illness of the Writer's Wife*

If you thought you were dying of cancer  
you wouldn't give a civil answer;  
and the best reviews that you could muster  
wouldn't make very much difference, buster.

You might become a trifle moody,  
although you're drinky, fat and foody,  
if the future seemed so bloody  
and there was no escaping, buddy.

You too would blaze up just as soon, ding-  
donging words both harsh and wounding;  
if you remember, pain's not funny  
when it lasts a long time, sonny.

You could be Shakespeare or Homer,  
threatened by a carcinoma  
your life too'd be sad and weary –  
your main desire survival, dearie.

For nursery days are gone, nightmare is  
real and there are no Good Fairies.  
The fox's teeth are in the bunny  
and nothing can remove them, honey.

## *Is There Life after Sex?*

Sad old people are no longer nubile,  
the fucate ladies have wrinkled faces,  
the men can defy gravity no more now  
than they can fly or accomplish bilocation  
or levitate, the accustomed miracles  
of hardness or wetness are past, long past

This doesn't mean that they have no feeling,  
inhabitants of an oblate spheroid,  
they too were never completely perfect,  
perhaps they never were drawn to bedrooms  
to handle the contents of skirts or trousers,  
what you've never had you can't miss

But love survives and the fact of nearness,  
too much sympathy may not be in order,  
they may have enjoyed much more than we have,  
touch is, after all, an animal comfort  
In a way, perhaps, the mind doesn't need it –  
obmutescence is an answer too

Leave the potency to the grandsons,  
they could say and entirely mean it  
Love is more than florulent verbiage  
and all delightful extravagant action  
is simply tenderness as a double crown poster,  
could be condensed to a postage stamp

Eschatological serious theories  
never mentioned the end of pleasure  
or took cognisance of those organs  
that can induce a secular ecstasy,  
gave us a huge and sombre fresco,  
no quick humanist esquisse

If latinists are shouting *Cave canem*  
there's life in the old dog yet, believe me,  
beyond the false gods of procreation.  
It's a great mistake, jampacked with error,  
farctate with jumbo disappointments,  
to make active sex a sacred cow.

*William McGonagall on England's  
Failure to Qualify for the World Cup,  
1974*

Now that the English have discovered they're on a sticky  
wicket  
And their Test teams aren't as good as they thought they  
were at cricket,  
And they've now absolutely completely lost face  
Even at football, what will the Nation do about this  
disgrace?  
I think they ought all to swarm to the cliffs and in  
communal despair  
Throw themselves into the sea, in a noble mass suicide  
darkening the air.

## *A Personal Footnote*

*'In addition, he will give you seven women, skilled in the fine crafts, Lesbians whom he chose for their exceptional beauty'*

The Iliad, Book 9.

Nobody has ever offered  
to give me seven Lesbians –  
though I was once a warrior  
for six long years,  
slept in a tent too  
on a sparse camp bed

Somehow I missed the  
spoils of the cities  
I was not important  
A silly Lieutenant  
can't sulk and get  
away with it

like grandiose Achilles

## *William Wordsworth (1770–1850)*

Most modern Nature Lovers have a personal scale of values that tells them what each tree, hill or bird's worth,  
but this doesn't apply to Wordsworth  
For Wordsworth, as it were, believing was much the same as seeing –  
he thought natural phenomena were the guardians of his heart and soul of all his moral being



The meadows and the woods and mountains kept him on  
the straight and narrow  
when he felt like getting pissed in places like  
Appleshwaite or Yarrow.

If he had an urge to go out on a thrash  
he would have to ask permission from a mountain ash.  
Nature was a kind of ever-present Nurse  
supervising all his life and all his verse.

The only time the system broke down seems to have  
been in France  
when he was young and revolutionary, and every  
advance  
in progressive thought was welcome. He wasn't the star  
of any leading lady's salon,  
but he succeeded completely in seducing a girl called  
Annette Vallon.

Though she became pregnant and had a B-A-B-Y  
William by then had wandered off, lonely as a cloud in a  
Lake District sky.

It all sounds very natural – but Nanny wasn't pleased;  
there is absolutely no doubt at all that William was seized  
by a fit of remorse and secrecy. From then on no man was  
a brother  
and he never again fancied republicanism or a bit of the  
other.

This, at any rate, is what they say. They say too that  
mountains for him were father-figures  
and wonderful things in his eyes, as wonderful as  
Tiggers.

But a more interesting question is *How did it come about?*  
This wasn't exactly the first time that William had been  
allowed out.

It sounds to me like a failure in communication, a  
misunderstanding.

Perhaps French trees, like the French, were too logical  
and not used to handing  
out advice and instructions for people's love life or  
guidance  
on what to do next, like the Athenes, Zeuses and  
Poseidons

who made Odysseus' life so difficult? Was William *en rapport*  
with the French meadows, woods, etc? Or did they say  
'*Tu as tort!*'  
when he told them they ought to be guardians of his  
moral being,  
and chuckle in a Gallic way? Or just start *oui, oui-ing?*  
I think he would have avoided all that guilt and loss if he  
had managed to give himself a less ridiculous  
philosophy

## *The Cricket of My Friends*

Ross in his days of youth  
was quite a bowler,  
energy rushed through his veins  
like Coca-Cola,

he could concentrate like an obsessive  
loony from Rampton,  
he certainly played for Oxford  
and for Northampton

Worsley was another natural  
born for cricket –  
in the Cambridge University team  
he once kept wicket

Clark, with a bat in his hand,  
could show his talents,  
his timing and footwork were good  
and so was his balance

Symons could play a bit,  
though table tennis  
was the game where he made his mark  
as a national menace

and worked himself up to be  
reserve for England –  
though never as good as the Chinks  
from ping-pong Ming land.

Romilly, Rycroft and Madge  
couldn't play for toffee –  
they were fonder of sitting and talking  
and drinking coffee.

I can't imagine a century  
being made by Spender.  
Was Fuller ever more  
than a good tail-ender?

(I may be doing him a real  
savage injustice).  
Connolly – an acquaintance –  
was better at pastis.

At least this is my own piece  
of intelligent guesswork.  
There's a gap between bat and pad  
and playing and press work.

You can't see Angus Wilson  
driving firmly through the covers;  
the literary ladies  
prefer playing games with lovers.

It's sad to see how little  
the literati  
have really achieved at cricket –  
though hale and hearty

they don't seem to have the *flair*  
The French are hopeless  
If clean cricket were next to godliness  
they would be soapless

So it's all a bad business –  
like the murder of a Kennedy –  
as for Literary Cricket  
I offer up this threnody

### *A Very Shocking Poem Found among the Papers of an Eminent Victorian Divine*

I saw you with Septimus on the parterre  
In front of the old Bishop's Palace  
The sunshine was weaving its gold in your hair  
But my heart was embittered and malice  
Moved in me mightily, jealous was I  
And I burned with desire to distress you,  
To down-thunder like Jove from that clear summer sky  
And at once, then and there, to undress you!

That hand, once in mine, was in his as you walked  
And answered him in your bright treble,  
Not a word could I hear but I knew that you talked  
And the Flesh rose up like a dark rebel –  
For that hand, as I knew, was an adjunct to Love,  
Like a hot caper sauce to hot mutton,  
And designed by the Lord to descend from above  
First to fondle – and then to unbutton!

Ah! those feet that ran to me won't run to me now,  
The dismal and desperate fact is  
They will turn to avoid me, for you will know how  
To go home with the Choir after Practice –  
Though you lingered once sweetly to dally with me  
And our preoccupations weren't choral  
As you sat in the sitting-room there on my knee  
And the examination was oral!

I saw those eyes opening, gazing at him  
With the blue of the midsummer heaven,  
My own eyes with traitorous tear-drops grew dim  
And of Rage, lustful Rage, a black leaven  
Worked in me there; for those eyes once had seen  
(Thought to break my heart, break it and rive it)  
On the ottoman, proud in its velvety green,  
Those parts that our God has called private!

I dream of a Paradise still, now and then,  
But it is not the orthodox milieu  
Where good spirits abound – with no women or men.  
Ah! My Conscience lies drowned like Ophelia!  
And my Heaven's a dream of an opulent South  
With soft cushions, wine, perfumes, bells ringing,  
My member for ever held tight in your mouth  
And a thousand bright choirboys all singing!

## *Limericks*

Limericks are a serious thing  
and as long as a short piece of string  
with a sting in their tails,  
unrestrainedly males,  
and as wild as a wasp on the wing.

Some limericks never wash clean,  
from their heads to their toes they're obscene,  
though it's not these extremes  
that elicit the screams  
but the things that they've got in between

They have oomph and some razamatazz,  
they're as joky and jaunty as jazz,  
they do far more than flirt,  
they get under a skirt,  
and defy all the Omo and Daz

They're as epigrammatic as efts  
and too slight to cause literary thefts –  
for what author would steal  
what's not even a meal  
but a weed growing in crannies and clefts?

You can see them exploding like squibs,  
untruthful and too fond of fibs,  
crude, simple, and yet  
one won't do as a pet –  
they're not angels or babies in bibs

It's their content, so beastly and bland,  
that a Holbrook or Whitehouse can't stand  
If you hear one at night  
it's much best to take fright  
and retreat to your bed out of hand

Though they seem unaccountably mild  
don't let them get near to your child –  
they can harm Mums and Dads  
and all sensitive lads  
come out coarsened and worsened and wild

So study the Classical modes,  
keep to elegies, epics and odes,  
for their lewd beck and nod  
is unwelcome to God  
and traumatic as ten-fingered toads

# *The Blurb*

This tenderly observant poet writes clearly,  
rhythmically and thoughtfully,  
about what all of us can understand. . .  
This unperturbed, unenvious and compassionate  
poet of doubt, common experience and  
the search for truth, we ought fully  
to appreciate. . .

He has reverence for the vastness around us  
and stands on the brink of eternity  
wondering whether it will be day, twilight  
or night when we are dead. He is the John Clare  
of the building estates, true and right  
to them as Clare to field and tree  
and ploughshare . . .

He has certainly closed the gap between  
poetry and the public which frankly  
the experiments and obscurity of the last  
fifty years have done so much (alas!) to widen . . .  
he has a vibrant sense of our shared past,  
of the *rerum* and their *lacrimae*,  
dead Tyre and Sidon. . .

## *To Lord Byron*

*on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his death,  
commemorated at the Victoria and Albert Museum*

You didn't much like relics. The 'lying bust'  
seemed to you too impersonal and cold  
to represent warm flesh, whose love and lust  
even the Puritans share (when not too old)

before they crumble into decent dust

What would *you* think of this? Would you feel 'sold'?  
For geniuses, alas, it's a tradition  
to end up as a paying Exhibition

So here are portraits of that gang you banged,  
the bright, unstable, intellectual ladies,  
evidence that an ancestor was nearly hanged  
(to roam, unblessed, the further shores of Hades),  
that in the Lords you once stood and harangued  
and kept a bear at Cambridge A bill (paid?) is  
exhibited as proof (bear food and lodging) –  
though, through your life, your debts were not for dodging

Here, from Miss Chaworth to La Guiccioli,  
with delicate miniatures and locks of hair,  
are philosophical ladies, prophetic, Nietzschey,  
high-waisted with their bosoms raised and bare –  
but also bakers' wives, untamed, unteacherly,  
one that was married to a gondolier  
That auburn curl (for some peculiar reason)  
of Lady Caroline Lamb gave me a *frisson*

Pathetic, too, to read Allegra's letters  
in copybook Italian, guided by nuns,  
who went to join her elders and her betters  
under those feverish Mediterranean suns  
at five years old *Caro Papa* Hounds, setters,  
horses you kept Children were shunned like duns  
Shelley, a guest at your Venetian palace,  
was right to be angry and to call you callous

But who am I to take a stance that's moral?  
Your entourage was not for little girls  
In any case it's far too late to quarrel –  
you were worth fifty of *our* Lords and Earls,  
in days when atom bombs shake ocean coral  
we are the swine to whom you cast your pearls,  
you stand like some far-shining distant lighthouse  
And what would you have thought of Mrs Whitehouse?



Would you be keen on Peter Pan and Wendy  
or anything that's cosy, coy or twee?  
Contrariwise, would you admire what's trendy  
(you were a fashion once yourself) or see  
virtue in what's suburban or weekendy?

To you, who only knew one kind of tea,  
who never knew what roaches or a jag meant,  
I dedicate this small Byronic fragment.

## *Valediction: To the Cricket Season*

As a boy who has lost a girl so sadly  
tears up a photograph or her early letters,  
knowing that what has gone is gone for ever,  
a lustful bustling,

the exchange of confidences, the hours of cuddling,  
the paraphernalia of what some call sharing,  
so we mourn you; televisually prepare for  
their filthy football,

professional fouls and the late late tackle,  
breakaway forwards held back by a jersey,  
the winning or losing almost equally nasty.

The English summer

is never perfect, but you are a feature  
as pleasing to us as a day of sunshine,  
to spectators at least a calm, straw-hatted  
Edwardian dandy.

Not really a game of physical contact,  
the batsman pardons the ungentlemanly bouncer,  
the only foul would be leg theory,  
bodyline bowling;

as nostalgic as those old school stories  
the plock of bat on ball penetrates outfield,  
calming to the mind Warm pints of bitter  
and county cricket

are long married in our friendly folklore  
of white marquees, the spires of cathedrals,  
pitch-wandering dogs, boys on the boundary,  
mystified girlfriends,

all of it as much a myth and a ritual  
as the fairy stories written by learned  
elf-haunted dons who invent a cosmos  
neat but escapist,

where the rules are forever, can never be broken,  
and a dragon, as it were, can be l b w  
if he puts a foot the wrong side of the mountain  
You are the bright one

that shines in the memory, as old-fashioned writers  
say 'she was a maid of some seventeen summers',  
we don't reckon age by the passing of winters,  
by happier seasons

we count up that final inescapable total,  
remember huge sixes by maverick sloggers –  
compensating, like love, for the field that's deserted,  
the padlocked pavilion

## *Sonnet: The Knowledge of Good and Evil*

In the Twenties we had children's books that made value judgements on wildlife, of an anthropomorphical kind:

*The Hundred Best Animals, Queer Fish and Secrets of the Zoo*

Not to mention the way the Flopsy Bunnies ran into trouble.

But now when you read a novel about rabbits it actually tells you the way rabbits live – as far as anyone who is not a rabbit can work it out. We've been told more, and we ought to know more.

But knowledge isn't enough. People have said that Hitler immunized us against his myxomatosis for ever.

Yet an understanding of sadism doesn't prevent it. So we have the Moors Murders, summary executions, the torture of prisoners – so many little fascist states where

Hitler would be happy. You must want, as well as know.

## *Sonnet: Mother Love*

Women are always fond of growing things. They like gardening; snipping, watering, pruning, bringing on the backward, aware of the forward; planting – not for nothing do they talk of 'nurseries'. Roses are like children, a source of pride, tulips are cosseted, primulas are pets. These are almost as loved as the usual surrogates – the dogs and cats that stand for families.

Conservation, preservation, it's a lovable aspect  
of maternalism (one reason why we're here)  
Better than that, this severe matriarchy  
is established over *plants*, the bossiness, thank God,  
that puts you there (delphiniums), you there  
(wallflowers),  
is harmlessly deflected well away from us

### *Sonnet: Malthusian*

All these wars, revolutions, famines, earthquakes, floods  
are blessings – and not in disguise They limit  
the numbers of those who pollute the earth, a planet  
growing colder to the greed of human life  
The Catholic exhortations to outnumbering  
are, in our context, disastrously sectarian  
We ought to be far fewer A general hope  
attaches to circling nuclear devices

Nobody wants to be, however, there –  
on the particular spot of weeding out  
Palestine, Belfast, Uganda Or to starve  
with Africans and Asians And that terrible bomb  
would solve the problem too efficiently  
Smug doomwatchers, we keep the telly tuned

## *Sonnet: Red in Tooth and Claw*

'Isn't Nature wonderful?' says a wondering lady  
while a TV feature shows the cuteness of hedgehogs,  
but can't look when a bustard is fed with a live mouse  
and the snuffling hedgehog crunches a baby vole.  
This is the Life people say they're on the side of –  
and there's eating and being eaten in many a boardroom,  
people too will kill to obtain food and status,  
literally. For that, too, watch television.

One can see how the writers of all those little poems  
celebrating wildlife, landscape and birdsong,  
might set their faces against brutalism in concrete,  
dreaming of that impossible, perfect, Rural England.  
But 'brutal' and 'bestial' are words that come from  
animals:  
foxes, to chickens, don't seem beautiful.

## *Sonnet: Carson McCullers*

To go into your South, a different life.  
Sowbelly and cornbread with syrup poured over it;  
or fried slices of side meat, collard greens, hoecakes.  
To go back and away towards the lonely freaks  
who can't communicate, who never communicate,  
and live on that diet of misunderstanding –  
poor whites, poor blacks, who never get the message.  
And what, for that matter, would ever be the message?

We all are freakish, mutes with hand signals,  
even the most talkative outgoing lady  
tells more about herself than what is actual  
Like the hot Italian *Mezzogiorno*  
your country was richest in superstition  
Where you were a one-eyed person, they were blind

### *Sonnet: Bear Thoughts*

Like Sir John Betjeman, I too have a teddy bear –  
from 1916 or thereabouts  
He sits in the hall, his fur rubbed through in places,  
one eye a proper one, the other just a button  
of a not very suitable kind He wears my son's school cap  
(discarded) and a shirt and shorts  
made for him by my sisters years ago  
He looks worn, like a man of nearly fifty-nine

I never talk to him My daughter does  
I can't remember much of our early days,  
this is a dead friendship and a long-past love  
What does survive (and witness Betjeman)  
is a feeling that he indeed is truly living  
Probably no one completely outgrows his childhood

## Sonnet: One

Where did *one* come from?

*One is continually appalled by . . .*

*One feels that in this movement Monteverdi . . .*

It must have been from the French (the Germans say *man*)  
but when and where? Voltaire doesn't use it –  
or does he? Nor the English (this is guesswork)  
much before Henry James. I have a vision of aesthetes  
leaning on Nineties mantelpieces, saying 'One. . . '.

by which they mean 'I' much more than 'we'.

Critics and reviewers use it, but it's sideways-sliding;  
it's better to say 'we' for a general judgment.

Critics can't be everybody, their omniscience is fiction.  
Nobody can ever speak for anybody but himself –  
and even then in doubt and great confusion.

## Sonnet: Mad Nature

The early morning crows are crowing all through  
Wordsworth's famous *Ode To A Shylock*,  
making a dull plonking sound like a bass guitar;  
some sheep are singing a well-known chorus from *The  
Messiah*

about navigation – 'All we like ships have gone astray'.  
The soda fountains with their purling streams  
bring transcendental music to the soul.

Park attendants shout a battle-cry: *Rus in urbe!*

Even if all this were so, it wouldn't be relevant  
really to men in their expanding cities  
What we've lost, we've lost And how far back  
do you want to go? The wheelwright's shop? The Iron  
Age?  
That noble anthropoid lived, not in innocence  
but fighting with his wits, the same as us

## Sonnet: Tidying up

Left lying about in my mind, awaiting collection,  
are the thoughts and phrases that are quite unsuitable  
and often shocking to all Right-thinking people –  
*penetrated by a purple penis* for example  
(almost a line?), and how it's almost certain,  
from Swift's hints, that the big sexy ladies of  
Brobdingnag  
used Gulliver as an instrument of masturbation  
Hence a tongue-twister *Glumdalclitch's clitoris*

Though not always decorous, there's a lot of force in  
phrases  
A good many poems stem from them, they start  
something  
More than anything Shakespeare owes his power to them  
(his *secret, black and midnight hags* and hundreds more),  
they almost consoled him – though life is pretty bloody  
(*the multitudinous seas incarnadine*)



## *Sonnet: Nasty*

Never forget that everybody's nasty.  
People can smile and pretend to be kind; it's  
as often as not a façade, behind is a good deal of  
selfishness and malevolence – which quickly become  
overt  
at the quick flare of passion – then, behind the curtains  
in that well-regulated villa, you see the torture-chamber.  
Angel in the street, devil in the home. A saying.  
Some are even devils in the home *and* devils in the street.

All this being so, my considered advice is:  
always give everyone the benefit of the doubt,  
consider them nice until proved otherwise.  
But don't be too naive. The neighbours whose house is  
continually filled with the screams of children  
may say 'Hello!' – but 'nice' is not their adjective.

## *Sonnet: The Prize*

The Prize is eternal peace. All sentient beings win it.  
God, like a visiting celebrity, hands it to each  
in full convocation of everybody living,  
the Pope or some magnified Prophet is there as  
Headmaster,  
Housemasters are heads of the Sects, benevolent smilers  
at a kind of never-ending award-giving Speech Day.  
Do the animals get in on the act? Some people have  
thought so,  
imagining cat Heavens, Purgatories for dogs . . .

This is what they say Personally I think we do,  
you and I and the ants in the ant-hill,  
achieve eternal peace in our separate endings,  
it's certain indeed nobody can bother us  
For those under pressure it sounds like a blessing –  
except that we're no longer conscious to enjoy it

### *Sonnet: Senility*

Go into a corner with bottle of whisky  
and grow old gracefully Those are my  
instructions to myself In one of his essays  
Montaigne says how in childhood  
most life is concentrated in the extremities  
(all that running, jumping, catching, throwing),  
in the middle part of life – well, in the middle  
(the active organs of romantic love)

This lasts well into old age Life just moves up the body  
It lodges finally in the head and throat  
Long live golosity and intellect! Our food no longer  
the food of love (though feminists, no-ball snowballs,  
call every man a two-ball screwball, in pure disdain),  
we can still eat and drink, and eat and drink

# *Or Where a Young Penguin Lies Screaming (1977)*

## *The Gentle Sex (1974)*

On Tuesday, 23 July,  
in that black sectarian Belfast  
under a rainy, cramped and hopeless sky  
five Loyalist women at last,  
after a false alarm visit the previous day,  
found Anne Ogilby in her home; under overcast  
weather, in a little car, they drove her away,  
leaving behind her five-year-old daughter Sharlene, who  
could only scream and cry.

Leader of the Women's UDA,  
Lilly Douglas was in charge.  
For questioning, to hear what Anne had to say  
(for cloudy suspicions were looming large  
over the little terraced houses of Sandy Row,  
full of memories of unemployment and bread and  
marge)  
why food-parcel money, that by rights should go  
on food for her boy friend in Long Kesh, had gone (they  
claimed) astray.

Each month £10.  
One of the women accusing,  
who hunted her down, we could say, like hounds,  
found it far from amusing  
that her husband was the boy friend who had lived  
with Anne  
for a full three months before arrest, refusing  
to return home, father of Anne's baby, a man  
who had had enough of her and her marital life – that's  
how it sounds.

They drove to a Loyalist club  
and questioned her, hard and mean,  
but then a UDA man from a pub  
happened to intervene –  
this was lucky for her indeed, and it certainly fell  
out luckily that he should have come on the scene  
At a bus station by the Europa Hotel  
they left her, released, as scared cats leave birds and dive  
under a shrub

A dark 31-year-old,  
unmarried mother of four;  
and even a British soldier, the women told,  
was father of one, a whore  
they couldn't call her, pots don't call kettles black,  
but they also said, and protested, a very great deal  
more  
about betrayed gunmen, a Protestant murder attack  
she had witnessed, and the 'kneecapping' of a sheep that  
tried to leave the fold

Just after 10 15  
Lilly Douglas's teenage daughter  
and another girl, only sixteen,  
stood in front of her bus and caught her  
They dragged her off In a small red Fiat, nine  
women started off to a 'Romper Room' in that quarter  
where their traitors are disciplined – fine  
for the beaters-up but for the others the fun isn't so good  
and clean

But, before they arrive, the car  
was stopped by police, who took  
them all back to the bus station, so far  
no crime – so whom could they book?  
Anne, the police say, kept nervously biting her nails  
but refused to make a complaint (though she did look  
like someone in need of help) Law fails  
always where the community knows, and won't tell,  
who the killers are

At 10.30, then, next day

(home in the small hours) she

failed to attend at the Welfare; but they

know she was there at three.

Meanwhile, in the Elm Bar, a 'heavy squad' was  
drinking –

'Bumper' Graham, three unemployed teenage girls. The  
key

to the whole situation, the woman of action and  
thinking

was 41-year-old Lilly, smuggler, forger, violent, drunk,  
brothel-keeper (police say).

Convicted, too. Gave order:

Graham to fetch Anne from Welfare.

He went. Without force, no lawless marauder,  
found her and took her from there.

The welfare officers had not even, then, been seen.

In an Edinburgh hostel, safe in their care,

a place had been found, for both Anne and Sharlene.

This she never knew. Of such missed trains and wrong  
destinations Time's a relentless hoarder.

But now: the Romper Room. And,

when Sharlene began to cry,

Graham put 10p into her childish hand,

said she'd see Mammy bye and bye

and told her to go out and buy herself some sweets.

Her mother was blindfolded with a tea towel; we  
know why

a dark brown bag was put over her head. In the  
streets

meanwhile life flowed easy in the uneasy city, like the sea  
lapping the sand.

Etty Cowan, Chrissie Smith, Joey Brown

wearing, all three, white masks

made from one of Joey's jumpers (put down,

it sounds like a game; but such tasks

come easy in the boredom and poverty of their  
existence),

walked in and began to 'romper' Anne Who asks,  
in such circumstances, exactly why? No resistance  
was offered as she was pushed and kicked from one to the  
other – like a circus clown

Graham and Joey were upset  
by now They tried to stop it  
But Etty Cowan was in her stride, all set,  
took a brick and wouldn't drop it,  
stood over Anne and banged it on her face,  
as hard as she could, a very determined moppet  
She and Chrissie stopped for a smoke Some  
minutes' grace  
she had from that, but soon they began again, giving it all  
they'd got – or could get

Outside the door Sharlene,  
back with a chocolate biscuit, screamed  
(inside, her mother screamed, obscene  
thumps, thuds, gurgles seemed  
the soundtrack of a nightmare, 'Mammy, I want my  
Mammy!'  
echoed outside, a bad dream crudely dreamed),  
through the brown bag perhaps the blood oozed,  
jammy –  
until she twitched no longer, even for those avengers, the  
slate wiped clean

So when they knew that she'd died  
they went for a bottle of wine  
They just shooed Sharlene outside  
and onto the streets The deep mine  
of vengeance was plumbed, the boil lanced  
The body? Disposed on a motorway Fine  
They got into a disco and danced  
For a good cause, and a mother's jealousy revenged, can  
make you feel warm inside

Oedema of the brain,  
associated fractures of the skull,  
and on the scalp the deepened main  
sixteen separate wounds. Dull  
their lives must have been, dull and dull indeed  
for this to be their pleasure! The wayward gull  
floats over Belfast; animals have no need  
for torture. Her face was completely black. And  
certainly, chewing gum in court, they'd do it again.

## *Shakespeare*

People facetiously say  
your name had you foxed with its spelling;  
and certain it is that the sound

of your plays was so different from what  
reverberates now from our stages  
that we must imagine a blend

of three accents now oceans apart –  
the Dublin, the Cockney, the Boston.  
'Break' was rhyming with 'speak',

both 'solid' and 'sullied' that flesh,  
Falstaff said 'reasons' like 'raisins'  
when he made his blackberry pun,

there was a mousetrap joke  
in 'tropically' spoken by Hamlet.  
Elizabeth even, the Queen,

that learnèd knitter of speech,  
dropped all her aitches like stitches.  
Faucal plosion is all,

fricatives land on the ear,  
and the word is labiodental  
for those who have mastered the craft

But accent and dialect, both,  
could never obscure your clear meaning –  
a sentence however pronounced

acquits you of being in the power  
of the specialist young phonetician  
Your rhetoric breaks through the net,

too strong for theory to hold,  
and Bernard Shaw said a true thing  
when on the old BBC

he said that you churned out plays  
like a series of cinema scripts that  
were wanted, and fast, for new films,

a parallel now – better still –  
would be with the insatiable telly  
Repeats were not common, a play

might be performed once and no more  
Quick-change artists and clever  
at patching on workable scenes

all of them had to be then –  
tradition alone made them poets,  
something to do with the Greeks

and the mystical power of the verse  
that was used for religious persuasion  
The song, as they said, of the goat

You got up some speed, and some fire  
flew out of your breathtaking phrases  
as you blasted your way down the track –



those multitudinous seas  
and aroint thee! and that rump-fed ronyon,  
words that for 10-year-old boys

had power in those earlier schools,  
where a highbrow word like aesthetics  
suggested the surgeon's knife

or nothing. We smile, but it's true.  
It was bear-baiting then or the cock-fights  
or hearing tempestuous shouts

from the Kings and the Queens and the Knaves  
and watching the stage-managed battles.  
A choice; and, as Beecham once said,

the British, a Philistine lot,  
don't really care much for music –  
they just like the noise that it makes.

So we were lucky all round,  
we got you by chance, a great genius,  
and (Honest Iago my foot!)

you fooled them; they thought you wrote plays –  
but all the time they were absorbing  
the highest, most durable Art.

*'The Lion griebs loped from the shade  
And on our knees their muzzles laid,  
And Death put down his book'*

Don't worry,  
poetry won't be as good as that again in a hurry!  
New 'schools', now,  
may regard us as a collection of old fools now,  
or wonder  
what on earth we saw in it – but, no blunder,  
what Bach had  
(strict formal beauty), what *The Hunting of the Snark* had,  
corroding  
and surreal anxiety, a sense of foreboding,  
and, in it  
all too, the urgency of the actual historical minute –  
these made it  
more compelling than the craftsman's ear by which he  
played it

Each age, I  
submit, has its own particular Journey of the Magi,  
they carry  
the gifts that alone can truly, faithfully, marry  
the ideal  
to our hesitating, wavering sense of what is real  
So Auden  
threw round the political nasties a sort of cordon,  
immunizing  
us against their infecting presence, and rising,  
a champion,

a serious singer, a warner, a Baptist, a Champion  
with social  
significance (a prophet whose 'Woe!' shall  
be ignored – as  
it always is – no more regarded than Harry Lauder's  
brash singing)  
came at us like Carroll's Bellman with that bell he was  
ringing!

Swinburne too  
once with the young men at Oxford certainly had his  
turn – to  
be chanted  
in evening streets. For some sort of Saviour is wanted.  
Dogmatics  
are twenty years old, with bats in their belfries and attics.  
a top storey  
that leans, not to work or moderation, but to death and  
glory,  
new magic –  
Auden's wonderful hybrid rose that crossed the comic  
with the tragic.

## *Home Truths*

What the censorious wives,  
the ones who throw words like knives,  
have never understood  
is how it's the hen that pecks –  
not the hope of better sex –  
makes men leave home for good.

By ravenous sirens misled  
into an alien bed?  
Not so The better lay  
might be in domestic sheets  
and it's not for erotic treats  
husbands go on their way

A truly nasty remark  
in the conjugal dark  
can act as a potent spur –  
he only wants to escape,  
in any form or shape,  
the flying of the fur

He longs for a different diet –  
a little peace and quiet;  
and to be always told  
how he's an also-ran  
and really hardly a man  
makes him feel very old

The Other Woman waits,  
and she's not hurling plates  
or thinking him inept  
or running a permanent quiz,  
it's him, just as he is,  
she will accept

The stir of a woman's tongue  
has got some good men hung  
in more vindictive days  
Trouble is what it stirs –  
not his alone, but hers –  
there's death in a phrase

# True Love

QUEEN IDDY, *musty pusty the fur-faced rat and Daffer Down Dilly* send all love to BUM FACE.

GROWLY BEAR, *the hedgehog loves you just a tiny tiny little bit.*

MARCELLA, *compliments of the Season from the Trollyfrog.*

DESPERATE DAN loves DORMOUSE *for ever and ever.*

– Valentine Day Notices, *The Guardian*, 14 February 1976.

From the unconscious, look what surfaced:  
a bear, a frog, a rat that's fur-faced!  
That's love for you! Infantile, it  
thinks baby talk's sure to beguile, it  
seriously believes in magic  
(and what reads comic might be tragic)  
where all *tristitia amoris*  
is simplified to fairy stories.  
Love, on this evidence, evinces  
a touching faith in all Frog Princes  
and such anthropomorphic fauna –  
far from our world of sex and sauna,  
which animal spirits don't make frisky  
half as much as tots of whisky.  
MARCELLA's lover, dark and shady,  
might be a Lesbian tea-lady?  
A Trollyfrog? And who's QUEEN IDDY?  
a cute chick or a fat old biddy?  
In lower case, too, musty pusty  
sounds unwholesome, dirty, dusty –  
love's trafficking in what's ideal  
disguises what's pathetic, real  
and subject to the years' bite, foully  
ageing, bad-tempered – in short GROWLY.

Bad life, bad sex, bad love not mentioned –  
 at least such words are well-intentioned,  
 comforting (though not too clever), land  
 us in a lovely Never Never Land  
 where true love is entirely normal  
 and Yours Sincerely not just formal,  
 a country of the mind, Utopian,  
 where no one knows about Fallopian  
 tubes, or impotence, abortions  
 aren't individual fruit pie portions  
 served to so many It's all jokey,  
 Lambeth Walk, and hokey-cokey,  
 schoolboy humour Surely BUM FACE  
 must be the jolly mask for some face  
 that has known how what's distressing  
 isn't much relieved by dressing  
 up in whiskers and false noses?  
 DESPERATE DAN, as one supposes,  
 is much closer to what lovers  
 usually find, his one line covers  
 with its sad, trite declaration  
 lifetimes of the desperation  
 most must meet with the Romantic –  
 that both delights and drives us frantic

## *Daisy from Bunny*

In a *Tales from Boccaccio* (1899), illustrated  
 by Byam Shaw in a William Morris style  
 and 'done into English' by Joseph Jacobs  
 (in whose Introduction it is stated  
 that stories which now raise a smile  
 in smoking rooms – an oral tradition –  
 were then 'published unblushingly' by men of  
 erudition),

on the slightly foxed fly-leaf, drawn in Indian ink,  
clearly,  
appears in the top left hand corner a single flower  
linked by a Gothic 'from' in the page's centre  
to a bottom right hand corner rabbit. Merely  
that and nothing more. The power  
of the pictographs was thought sufficient;  
amusing, intimate, and obviously not deficient –

in cosiness, coyness (our view) or (theirs?) emotion.  
How very English, we feel. The rabbit is not badly  
drawn.

The four *Tales* are not the sexy ones. The problem  
is this. We still can have no notion,  
was he a cousin or, lovelorn,  
*after* Daisy, Fleur, Marguerite? It's funny  
how copulation and cuddliness are combined in a name  
like Bunny.

## 'Brilliant Spy and Totally Inadequate Man'

– *The Spectator* on a character of John Le Carré

Last seen in a bar called 'The Whore's Shoe'.

Gone fishing with an agent out of Prague.

A life constructed of episodes.

Notes on the piano, ambiguous to the last.

Nothing rhymes. It's just a syllable

count. It's Time that carries you on, from one  
electric second of the clock's tick  
to the next – and all it means is purely nothing.

Knitting is what it's like, long stories  
where stitches link in line like woolly spies –  
networks and cover, safe houses, who's  
blown? Your mind must hold it all in place, like knitting

Boring it certainly is – and quite  
fairly futile Messages from Control  
sometimes come through but praise is rare and  
letter-placing arduous, from within, boring.

Mole Into that foreign soil burrowed,  
a fox among the Philistines – Nature  
provides parallels, host/parasite,  
so does History Zeebrugge too had a mole

Man you are and secret If the cap  
fits, wear it All you'll get from literates,  
in human terms sad, this epitaph  
'brilliant spy and totally inadequate man'

## *September Cricket, 1975*

The rough brown grass at the end of the field  
where the spectators are sitting  
is dappled with dead leaves (the wind lifts  
them misleadingly like butterflies, and sifts  
through the dryness, summer was hard-hitting)  
Quiet cricket, no drama – unless someone appealed –

but for one wasp, two flies, that grass is insect-dead  
It could be, easily, fifty  
years ago – the same houses, the same church –  
we can say, without benefit of research,  
that time, spendthrift changer, was thrifty  
and changed most of this only in the head



The clothes of the watchers and the shapes of the cars  
parked round the Common  
are really the only specific outward signs  
that we run our lives now on different lines  
since they died at Mons, on the Somme, on  
those battlefields now as remote as Mars –

and we've had our own wars, big and small.  
No change in the middle  
with bowlers, batsmen, overs and pads –  
but apart from the players (the local lads),  
a few wives and kids (this is the riddle),  
almost nobody is watching this game at all!

Apart from myself, just three separate old men –  
count them on the fingers  
of some televisual technological hand.  
Yet this is Village Cricket, you understand,  
an Old English thing, that still lingers  
and keeps going unfailingly, like Big Ben –

so they all wishfully hope and say.  
Don't let's be elegiac,  
too many people are. Even with folk lore,  
it's always far better to know the score  
(give up head-hunting, like the head-hunting Dyak).  
Perhaps, in a sunny September, village cricket has had its  
day?

# *The Price of Things*

*'What aspect does the unwisdom take?'*

*'Certain absorbtion I have other and terribly important things to do The husband is most worthy, one wonders what the next few years will bring Their temperaments must be as the poles'*

ELINOR GLYN, *The Price of Things*

The moralists say there's a price  
for the pleasures that make the brain swoony,  
and all those who have them must pay,

so the fiery tempestuous mates  
in love stories by passionate women  
have their troubles – although they succeed

in the end with a baby and bliss  
(in this kind of fantasy usual)  
And the 'all for love', as they say,

works out well for the family name  
but the scented half-Turkish pretender  
is exposed as the man that he is,

as a taker of drugs and the slave  
of the beautiful sensual spy, she  
has her firing squad at Vincennes

While grey-eyed Amaryllis Ardayre  
sees the war take her impotent husband  
(a hunting accident here

has made him entirely no good –  
says a surgeon of fame, Lemon Bridges)  
and can marry his cousin She sees

‘how extraordinarily well his bronze hair  
was planted’ (it reads) ‘on his forehead. . .’

By a trick, he has slept with her, to

ensure that there will be an heir –  
she didn’t know it was him, it was all the result of  
collusion.

There has always been an Ardayre

at Ardayre. What the average girl  
thought of this, in the Twenties, I wonder  
as I read through each brown-white foxed page.

Did they know it was all make-believe?  
And what about poor Edith Thompson –  
perhaps for her it was real,

and she felt it her Duty to Love  
as she read all those novels of High Life  
where the heroines fascinate men

in the Carlton, Brook Street, or the Ritz?  
Scents, jewels, cigarettes, pianos, brandy –  
to set off *her* beauty, of course –

and the *tête-à-tête* dinners with wine!  
When she ended up labelled a Temptress  
that all decent women would shun,

unpredictably cast as The Spy  
and hauled to that drugged execution,  
did she think it was cheap at the price?

If you see reality clear  
with its blackheaded face in the mirror,  
this may be a far better thing

than the daydream that goes with champagne  
and wakes up with a hangover, blinking,  
to the terrible trap in the floor.

## *A Passionate Woman*\*

As I stood there in my tea-gown,  
picture of a passionate woman,  
I shot him six times, brain matter  
fresh from the head wounds

And the first shot was for the vulva,  
the hot revenge of a lover,  
I had the gun now, lead semen  
splurged in his soft flesh

The clitoris triggered the second  
hating his questing mouth-tongue,  
it hit him, swelled with blood-anger,  
surfeit and tasting

The third one was for the anus,  
fingered and pricked so often,  
an exit used as an entry,  
tender, resentful

The fourth bullet had nipples  
written all over it –  
they were so bitten, erected,  
stood up like cobras

The fifth came straight from the labia,  
frivolously toyed with,  
brushed aside mostly, neglectful,  
his mouth paid blood money

The sixth avenged my own mouth,  
forced to the licking cocksuck  
by my own desires, mouthfuls  
it gave him – not of kisses

\* See a story by Somerset Maugham – *The Letter* – based on a real happening in the Far East

## *To the Dead*

You were there with a glass in your hand,  
and loving it so –  
I confess that I don't understand  
why you had to go.

You were smoking your head off and gay –  
now you're not there.  
Was it something I said? didn't say?  
It isn't fair

You were rogering several girls,  
enjoying it a lot –  
a privileged swine among pearls –  
and now you're not.

You had all the best cards in the deck  
a moment ago –  
then you sank out of sight like a wreck,  
why, I don't know.

You vanished so quickly it's hard  
to account for your choice.  
Did a doom turn up with a card –  
or a Master's voice?

# *The Gods of the Copybook Headings*

*In May 1976, forty years after Kipling's death, a class of thirteen adult British 'O' Level English Language students had never heard of Kipling, nor had they heard of any of his books (even the children's books), though one student thought he might have written poems. Another asked if he was anything to do with Mr Kipling's Cakes – Author's note*

Though you use Old Testament phrases, as Biblical as  
could be,  
When you're pushing up the daisies you will certainly  
agree  
That even the Best get forgotten (we're an  
absent-minded lot),  
The Good Tree with the Rotten, if they're not there on  
the spot

You can write like a Cockney soldier an' show yer  
bleedin' 'cart –  
When your bones are growing mouldier than they ever  
were at the start  
They'll be asking 'Who was Atkins?' with a blank and  
mystified stare,  
There'll be daffodils and catkins, in a Spring when you're  
not there

You can write the Great Short Stories, on the sentimental  
side,  
With the polines pleasing to Tories, and lament how the  
loved ones died  
You can fill them with genuine feeling (and dialect), all  
your skill  
Won't make them much more appealing to Time, as he  
moves on still

Remember it has been written how *Those to whom Evil is  
done*  
*Do Evil*; and, Once Bitten, when your life had scarcely  
begun,  
You might develop a Trauma and turn into a Bully  
yourself –  
Not the Latter or the Former will stay long on the library  
shelf.

The Gods of the Copybook Headings treat even Good  
Writers with scorn,  
They don't reckon much with our weddings and how  
many children were born.  
They are Anglo-Saxon and clannish; like their  
Copybooks, dated too.  
They, too, in the end will vanish – and so, I'm afraid, will  
you.

## *What It Is*

It's very like a sneeze  
that can, partly, be controlled by the will –  
it's postponed only, it's sure to come,  
and a lot of the pleasure is in the postponement,  
the delayed explosion.

It's like sawing wood;  
two people with a two-handed saw  
pull in an ecstasy of rhythm,  
increasing the speed with each stroke  
until they are through.

It's like a little death,  
a falling through consciousness into oblivion,  
a peculiar kind of peace, after  
the unarmed combat, the struggle –  
deep rest after effort.

# *On The Tercentenary of Milton's Death*

E Jarvis-Thribb (17) and Keith's Mum  
don't reckon you,  
even students of English get lost  
in your syntax,  
the long sentences and the Greek idioms  
(‘he knew to build’)  
confuse the lovers of what's simple,  
the multitudinous  
classical allusions just fill them with boredom  
Eliot's hypothesis  
was that your magniloquence led on to Wordsworth  
and Coleridge, poets  
who could write (or talk) the hind leg off a donkey

You didn't have much use for humour,  
wit vanished early  
from your verse (in any sense) and rhyme  
you thought barbarous,  
perhaps in your day nothing much was funny,  
as now in Ulster,  
and how could you have the needed detachment?  
But like a rocket  
you took off for outer space and the SF demons,  
you really did go  
into overdrive, no short-haul aircraft,  
medium range bomber  
or helicopter, but a giant block buster

So for this kind of verse, which has a genuine grandeur,  
you are the best one –  
Wordsworth's dim mountains are only molehills,  
I think, compared  
You truly invented your own mighty language –  
like Ulysses' bow,  
nobody else could handle it, it beat them  
Of course you took sides



and suffered for it; if pride was your fault, still  
you had cause for that.

The young undergraduate of Christ's College  
combing his long blond hair  
with an ivory comb? As well as arrogance, beauty.

## *The Lady Left Behind*

*'When boys and girls go out to play there is always someone left  
behind, and the boy who is left behind is no use to the girl who is  
left behind.'*

PAUL POTTS, *Dante Called You Beatrice*

The affaires of the Spring and Summer are already under  
way

but nobody looks at *me* yet, as day succeeds to day,  
and nobody *will* look at me – this is my constant fear –  
through all the days of sunshine and all the coming year.

Each morning I look in the mirror, I see an older face,  
the face of someone defeated – without charm, without  
grace.

I see the couples together, sitting and drinking wine.  
They look into each other's eyes – no one looks into  
mine.

They're saying 'But you're beautiful!' and pressing hands  
(or feet)

secretly in the restaurant. No one says 'You're so sweet!'  
or sits at *my* lonely table. I feel the waiters sneer –  
permanently on the waiting list, without a cavalier.

Everyone thinks it's funny I'm spoiling for a man,  
'on the shelf', a 'spinster', a 'frustrated' also-ran  
So many jokes on the telly! Jokes that everyone's heard –  
but a human being *can* spoil, you know, spoiling's the  
right word!

## *How Tragedy Is Impossible*

There are sorrows in herds that are too deep for words,  
and the true concentration camp horror  
isn't lessened by sighs, if, by torture, one dies it isn't  
much use saying 'Begorrah'  
and it's perfectly clear that to murmur 'Oh dear!' as you  
fall from the face of the Eiger  
or to mouth 'Me, oh my!' (an inadequate cry) when  
you're bitten in half by a tiger  
can by no means express your true state of distress Will  
Shakespeare was once reckoned clever  
but the nearest he got to that sensitive spot was 'Never,  
never, never, never, never!'

For the words are too weak To moan 'Oimoi!' in Greek  
was no better than our interjections  
It is simply a sound we can get our tongues round with a  
varying force and inflexions  
but it doesn't explain or make clear, or complain, with  
anything much that's specific,  
and the brain is quite numb (that is what makes us dumb)  
in the face of the really horrific  
What you feel is immense, but beyond sound and sense,  
and the shock is a strong anaesthetic,  
for what knocks you right out can't be said in a shout  
And all such attempts are pathetic

It's the same with our love (rhymes are 'dove' and  
'above', and nothing much else that's romantic);  
you adore her big eyes (and her hand on your flies) and  
this passion is making you frantic,  
and you dote to excess – but until you undress there is no  
cogent way to convey it.

It's a very odd thing, that (perhaps) you can sing and  
(just) feel, think or touch – but not say it.

For our loves are like surds and too way out for words;  
finite terms of our ordinary numbers  
can't express them at all, they drive us up the wall – and  
archaic, with 'smitten' and 'slumbers'.

But there's one kind of Muse who will never refuse,  
except when the bombs are atomic,  
to provide a good phrase, who is always in phase with  
events – and you could call her Comic,  
though her humour's quite wry, rational, even dry on  
occasion. And yet her wild farces  
succeed time and again – while the serious men, striking  
attitudes, end on their arses –  
because, you will find, they appeal to the mind and  
they've not blown their top with emotion  
and it's better to think than to take drugs or drink – you  
might even avoid that explosion!

## *Oh, Darling!*

'Oh, darling, I've brought you a present,  
it's here by the side of the bed,  
by your beautiful plump naked bottom  
and your beautiful feminine head.  
Move over and let me show you,  
reclined like an odalisque there  
with your breasts like two soft circles  
and triangular pubic hair.'

'Oh, darling, it looks Victorian!  
Such a box! of such lovely wood!  
Is it mother of pearl at the corners?  
You have always understood  
how a woman adores *surprises*!  
and the nice unexpected things  
(like red roses, a film, or a theatre)  
are exciting as diamond rings!'

'Oh, darling, I wanted to please you,  
I went to a very good shop  
to buy something to keep us together  
and ensure that our loves never stop  
It's a gift of the gods – you could call it  
a bond that binds more than a kiss –  
among all of the other antiques there  
there was nothing as fine as this!'

'Oh, darling! But how does it open?  
It looks so polished and clean –  
but is there a key to go with it,  
or do you press something? I mean,  
I can't see a sign of a keyhole  
Oh, it *slides*! How ingenious, dear!  
Let me move a bit, so I can kiss you –  
but *please* don't bite my ear!'

'Oh, darling, you've taken the lid off,  
so tell me at once what you see –  
for you it may not have the meaning  
that it has, never doubt it, for me!  
It is more than a beautiful symbol,  
it's a practical means to an end,  
it's a lover whose love is eternal  
and a permanent faithful friend!'

'Oh darling, you've loved me and kissed me,  
you've shown me a barrel of fun,  
and a thousand good times with your ardour,  
so why – now – do you show me a *gun*?

I can see it's an old-fashioned pistol,  
it's lovely, but has it been fired?  
With such things, I must tell you, my darling,  
I'm really a terrible coward!

'Oh, darling, I asked. It's a virgin,  
as it lies there with its deathly gleam,  
and nobody yet has exploited  
its potential, fulfilling the dream!  
As it lies there, on pale lilac velvet,  
so snugly indented, so cold,  
don't you see it is Love, even Youth, there –  
and a charm against us growing old!'

'Oh, darling, But why do you glare so?  
Is it *loaded*? I guess by your eyes!  
They are savaging me, sad and lion-like!  
This is quite an *unpleasant* surprise!  
I was glad (it's aimed at me! Oh, Heaven!)  
to assist in the sexual act  
(Please, please, darling, don't pull the trigger!)  
but *not* in a Suicide Pact!'

## *The Ella Wheeler Wilcox Woo*

We could be chums, you and I,  
And in greatness of heart we could dare –  
As the sun is steadfast in the sky  
We two could be constant there;  
For a man and a woman in love  
Reckon not of the changing of Time  
As the hand fits so close in the glove  
And heartbeats rhyme!

I could match with an ardent soul  
Your longings to hold me close  
While the bells of the earthbound toll  
In the lives of the dull and gross!  
Yea, we could ascend on high  
Above the unfeeling old earth!  
Oh, will you not echo the cry  
And give it birth?

Shall the twain never be as one  
As we float far and free as a bird  
In the smile of the beaming sun,  
Borne aloft o'er the teeming herd?  
Oh, tell me now, dear, of those wings  
That could lift us both, carrying you  
To my land where pure happiness sings  
Up in the blue!

To that peak where the mist-cloud is curled  
Let us strive, in a union so blest  
That it takes no account of the World  
Where the mercen'ry gain is the best –  
Let us love, in our loving so brave  
That in loving alone is our pride,  
True chums, that is all that I crave,  
And side by side!

## *Perchance a Jealous Foe*

It was Spring when Annabel came to Stoatswold  
The old house lay slumbering in the warm Spring  
sunshine  
as though waiting for something to happen Nothing  
happened

The smoke just curled up lazily from Elizabethan chimneys as it had for generations of incumbent Stoatswolds, an old family and proud of it—from before the Normans. (In fact, the present owner was Sir Norman Stoatswold, a widower who smoked a pipe in the Long Garden and was well-known locally for the quality of his shorthorns).

Annabel came, of course, as a governess. Her young charge

was pretty little Myfanwy Stoatswold, fifteen and headstrong.

She was called Myfanwy because her dead mother had been a Welsh Nationalist (and hated Suffolk).

Annabel often wondered if she would have been called Fiona

if the nationality had been otherwise. She never asked him.

Sir Norman was a man's man, and only spoke in monosyllables.

He was very gruff and shy and terrified of women, much preferring his pipe. Annabel gave him his favourite tobacco for his forty-fifth birthday.

His eyes seemed to light up with a brief understanding.

Myfanwy was a bit of a minx but everyone loved her.

A madcap girl who rode tractors side-saddle and was on good terms with all the farmhands,

she nevertheless used to split the infinitive

and her spelling was atrocious. Annabel often

wondered if she would ever pass her 'O' Level English—though she thought she might do well as a liberated

woman,

with all that money. Annabel herself came

from the large family of an impoverished clergyman.

She was cheerful but indigent.

Time went by, and one day succeeded another.

At a party in the nearby market town,

to which Annabel had been invited by accident,  
she met Sebastian Anchovy, a sophisticated novelist  
and a member of another old County family –  
carried away by an impulse and without really meaning  
to,  
she took his side in an argument with Emery Sandpiper,  
the Cockney critic, very brash and abrasive from his TV  
appearances,  
who was saying how Margaret Drabble was really thick  
Annabel bristled with offended sensibility  
and Sebastian said calmly 'I beg to differ'  
Later he slipped her a joint in the bathroom  
and they achieved a certain *rapprochement* of fellow feeling,  
as he explained to her how Oxford wasn't Cambridge

After that they continued to meet fairly often  
For afternoons together they would go off cycling,  
wobbling through the primroses Once Sebastian  
laid a hand on her knee as they sat in a tea room  
Annabel knew he was beginning to care for her  
He even came to Stoatswold, and talked about  
shorthorns  
They would all three be sitting, with glasses of cowslip  
wine  
(Myfanwy, the tomboy, was out shooting rabbits  
in the company of a ferret called Fred),  
and Sebastian would discourse at length about his  
ancestors  
Sir Norman said nothing, but carefully refilled his pipe  
In these conversations he was a kind of smoke-screen,  
under cover of which Sebastian made advances

Finally Annabel allowed him to kiss her  
They became engaged – but were keeping it secret  
because of his mother, old Lady Anchovy  
Sir Norman was silent but seemed rather moody –  
you could never tell what he was thinking  
Myfanwy had a crush on a cowhand called Joe  
and was oblivious to everything that happened around  
her



Nothing did happen – which was standard and par for the course, as Sebastian might have said in his civilized manner. Until one evening, when Sir Norman had certainly taken far more cowslip wine than was really good for him, he dropped a pipe and broke it. ‘Oh, flip!’ he shouted. Annabel was amazed to hear him swearing – he was the sort of man who says ‘Ladies present!’ – so she stared at him. ‘What are you staring at, you sly little puss?!’ Sir Norman bellowed. ‘I’ve seen you with Sebastian in the rhododendrons!’

Annabel caught a hanky to her eyes and rushed from the room.

At breakfast the next morning, over his scrambled eggs, Sir Norman apologized. Later that day he brushed against her, accidentally, in a passage. Annabel felt the blood rising to her face. Abruptly he seized her. ‘Oh, Annabel! My darling! How can I live without you?’ Impulsively he strained her to him. His moustache on her forehead tickled her slightly – but quickly she realized how her feeling for Sebastian was terribly superficial. ‘Let me think!’ she riposted; and half an hour later the engagement was broken; and in the late summer she became Lady Stoatswold. And in her honour Myfanwy changed the name of her favourite ferret and called her Annabel – she was the wife of Fred.

## *The Thirties Love Lyric*

I follow you in my mind,  
I see you each day,  
how you go on your way,  
and I watch you so faithfully then,  
as you walk about among men!

If they should pinch your behind  
or stroke a big boob  
in the closely-packed Tube  
that would just be the Rubicon, when  
you walk so aloof among men!

I'm with you now in the spirit, close,  
so near you – though we're parted –  
and I don't need to be too verbose  
to say I'm broken-hearted

My thoughts follow you as you find  
your sweet way to the office  
and all of those coffees,  
they stick close as toffees, dear, when  
you go out to work among men!

I still watch over you, kind,  
(though it seems very trite)  
when you come home at night –  
avoid boys who get tight,  
darling, then  
you might live so safe among men!

You are the fruit, I'm the rind,  
and I'm there to protect  
though the worst I expect  
is you won't be select-  
ive, quite, when  
you're offered the friendship of men!

I'm never far, though I'm miles away,  
I see you very clearly,  
I'm counting hours till that distant day  
when I'm more than Yours sincerely . . .

These are the links that can bind –  
though the boss is your type,  
with blue eyes and a pipe,  
please ignore all his hyp-  
erbole – then  
you'll still be mine among men!

## *The Reviewing of Poetry*

So your new book's just out? You should splash wine  
about – for this must be a joyful occasion?  
Not at all! you reply to that questioning eye, for the  
critical gift of 'abrasion'  
is the one that's most favoured – you're salt that's not  
savoured; reviewers must be *entertaining*  
(readers must have their fun) – though they're in a bright  
sun, they will tell their dim public it's raining  
if this makes a good story, for a journalist's glory is to stir  
up those somnolent morons  
who have much less idea of the art we have here than a  
tribe of illiterate Hurons!

Circulation's shoe pinches – they waste column inches on  
 mocking the innocent photos  
 of the authors on jackets (like flowers on seed packets) –  
 then proceed with andante con motos  
 to lament with a tear how it doesn't appear, although *their*  
 attempts are so gallant,  
 that a person could find, unless out of his mind, the  
 slightest small vestige of talent  
 in this tedious verbiage that runs wild like herbage all  
 over the pitiful pages.  
 But if Truth's what you want, from an unsullied font,  
 you should know that it isn't for ages  
 or possibly ever that he's been so clever (although he's  
 devoted to Culture)  
 to sort out in his head what's worthwhile that he's read or  
 to tell a good verse from a vulture!  
 It's so safe, though, mock-sad, to call everything bad, no  
 one then can say you were a sucker  
 if the fashion should change and you had to arrange to  
 revive that young lad Tommy Tucker  
 as inspired 'Nursery Folk' – and this isn't a joke – it could  
 happen and maybe to-morrow  
 (and with no thought of merit – a rabbit's a ferret for *them*  
 and a Cotman a Corot)  
 that for Gunn and Ted Hughes we read 'Rhythm and  
 Blues' in half-with-it, half-in school anthologies  
 where a bad word like 'bed', if it raises its head, is quite  
 stifled at once with apologies –  
 for as everyone knows from his head to his toes (or her  
 toes) there is no animality  
 in a teenager's heart They are pure in each part, and the  
 word they've not heard's 'sexuality'  
 What they don't understand, critics blast out of hand –  
 they're spectators who don't know the rules well  
 in a whole lot of cases, but they don't hide their faces!  
 They will say that they don't suffer fools well  
 and with no hint of shame they will go on to blame the  
 poor writer, it's very much harder  
 to produce wholesome food than to write something  
 rude pointing out that there's zilch in the larder!

For it's hard to create. And it's Art that they hate. It's not  
newsworthy – nobody cares much,  
readers don't want to know; it seems baiting a poet's just  
fun – as it once was with bears, much  
less exciting perhaps, more like throwing of craps – but it  
raises *your* temperature highly,  
paranoia is throbbing, there's sighing and sobbing, and  
those darts have gone home, oh, so slyly –

for you can't bear to look at your miserable book, and a  
needless bad line drills a hole in your spine, and you feel  
you would like someone's head on a spike and – of true  
SF size, just to kick in their eyes – centipedes in big boots,  
to reduce their gay hoots to a terrible scream, make their  
life a bad dream, as you burn for revenge from Pitlochry  
to Penge, and you feel all your efforts wasted;

but at least the book's out (to a jeer or a shout) and,  
although you feel vexed, you can start on the next –  
and it couldn't be *more* panned and pasted!

## *A Wee Sang for St Andrew's Day*

Wha dreams that I am nae a Scot,  
Yon is a blastit Hottentot,  
A rude uneducatit clot –  
In Southron speech –  
Lang may his cods unusit rot,  
Craibs bite his breech!

May nae wlonk wink him wi' her ee,  
May mini-sarks his presence flee  
An' houghmagandie sic as he  
Ay strang avoid;  
His lume til that he comes to dee  
A' unemployed!

I canna thole sic wallidraggs –  
 Auld Scots an' new my Music brags,  
 She can blaw baith on tartan bags  
     Wi' canty mou',  
 The Saltire's on the best 'o flags  
     When I am fou'

What though I live by London's wa'?  
 I ken richt weil the waups that ca'  
 The hairts o' Scots, aye, ane an' a',  
     Baith rich an' puir;  
 I ken too Celtic an' fitba',  
     The burn an' muir

Sae let nae daft presumptuous loon  
 Wha's plaid's a stiflin' word-cocoon  
 Preach Lallans tae me, late an' soon.  
     There's mony a sang  
 In mony a tongue ancath the moon –  
     And nane is wrang'

#### GLOSSARY

cods	<i>balls</i>	wallidraggs	<i>weaklings</i>
craibs	<i>crabs</i>	bags	<i>bagpipes</i>
wlonk	<i>lovely lady</i>	canty	<i>happy</i>
mini-sarks	<i>shortie nighties</i> (cf 'cutty sark')	mou	<i>mouth</i>
		fou	<i>drunk</i>
houghmagandie	<i>fornication</i>	waups	<i>curllews</i>
lume	<i>penis</i>	fitba'	<i>football</i>
thole	<i>endure</i>		

Lallans *Lowland Scots*

# *The Noble English Traveller Contemplates Turkish Delight*

That heavy-featured Turkish face  
reminds me of another place;  
for most of 1873  
we shall be joined in buggeree.

Your harem trousers filled with grace  
are like balloons in Chevy Chase;  
you are the most delightful she  
I ever filled with buggeree.

You flap and flop like dab or dace  
as I increase my headlong pacc;  
I feel you doubled under me.  
in quintessential buggeree.

And as I ride and as I race  
no gentleman jockey trumps my acc;  
as sweating under the Turkish tree  
you suffer the joys of buggeree.

So far from Western fur and lace,  
fat nakedness is no disgrace;  
you only feel completely free  
in the male grip of buggeree.

## *'A Good Mouse Needs No Preparation'*

*— interview with a policeman, breeder of prize-winning mice,  
broadcast 9 June 1975 on BBC Radio 4*

This is an age  
when people throw Life quivering on the page,  
untidy, crude,  
or on a screen or canvas — hot and nude  
the Muse lies there  
gasping, quite unadorned, completely bare,  
while all agree  
if she were clothed she wouldn't then be She  
Her lovers, firm  
in adoration, pour out words like sperm  
The act is all —  
simple intensity, the mating call  
we recognise  
Bras, panties, hats are inessential lies

A certain truth  
such wooers have, though they are so uncouth  
Some passionate thought  
must still be there, the skilful and untaught  
alike must bring  
a kind of ardour — or the words won't sing  
The pulsing heart  
romantically throbs in the best Art,  
but not direct,  
for we should emphasize, refine, select  
Pejorative word,  
it's 'artificial', but it's not absurd,  
wrong, or ungood,  
to carve the statue from the native wood

Tool-making man  
always improves on Nature, if he can  
The critic raves  
about those buffaloes painted in caves



so long ago.  
This is what's called 'technique' (you want to know?),  
magic or not;  
it's what we have and animals haven't got.  
Some wash their mice  
(painting is not allowed) to make them nice,  
or use a comb.  
I'm on their side – a house is not a home,  
and caring helps  
verse, painting, music, mice, cubs, kittens, whelps.

## *Leaving Leeds*

*'I used once to be plagued by a man who wrote verses, but who literally had no other notion of a verse, but that it consisted of ten syllables. Lay your knife and your fork across your plate, was to him a verse:*

*'Lay your knife and your fork, across your plate.'*

BOSWELL'S *Life of Johnson*, quoted by Roy Fuller in *Owls and Artificers*

Lay your knife and your fork, across your plate,  
see the sun as it shines, on yellow egg,  
brighter certainly too, your bacon gone.  
Coffee! Coffee! Four cups, awakened now,  
(Yorkshire breakfast, ee lad, a champion meal)  
smoke, enjoy the cigar, a footbridge waits,  
cross it, handle your bag, a London train!

In, then, quick! To relax, ignore the child  
climbing over your knee, complacent mum,  
dad with sport and the nudes, the daily dose,  
football godlike and good, the city's love.

Hear the voice of a girl, a children's nurse  
come from Cromer to York, returning now,  
saying 'Difficult! Yes, a father's boy!'

Yesterday you were there, to read some verse,  
students' listening beads, refused the mike,  
spoke it cosily too, elitist crap  
*they* thought, probably, rhyme, who really now  
needs it? formalist yet, bad marks from Marx!  
Golden oldies are few, ambitions make  
swollen heads and bad thoughts, not very nice

Softly dieseling through, the train is calm,  
lunch comes charmingly round, a soothing time,  
hearing opposite men, the business ones,  
talking, knowing, of cars, the horsepower boys  
Life is various too, and we have luck –  
starving, beaten, diseased, no, that we're not  
Countries prosper or fail, get down and out

Systems need to be changed, and that's the truth  
Money, profit and work, they wear us down,  
sacred cows of our life, that don't regard  
verse's stresses and strains, yet these at least,  
harmless, innocent, clear, are playful ploys  
exercised for us all, to entertain  
Boswell's comma is fun, but not for us

# The Immense Advantage

*' "I was thinking you might like gooseberry tart and cream for a sweet, miss."*

*'Oh that I could have vented my New World enthusiasm in a shriek of delight as I heard those intoxicating words, heretofore met only in English novels!'*

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN, *A Cathedral Courtship* (1893)

*'A hundred years ago, England had over America what Emerson called "the immense advantage". American thoughts, he wrote, were English thoughts. Today it would be as true to say that America has the advantage over Europe.'*

STEPHEN SPENDER (1973)

Aw, shit, man!

What's England compared to Whitman?

Or being British

(though DHL was so cuntish and tittish)?

Even Creeley

is as way-out to *them* as stoned Swahili,

great bearded Ginsberg

is a frightening outer suburb of old-time Sinsburg.

All effete cultures

wind up, as they should, in the claws of the vultures.

I intention

to nominate the whole gang as a lavender convention,  
once-English Auden

a has-been golden oldie as square as Trollope's Warden.

'Be a Star-screw!'

yelled Corso, fuck-holes mesmerized McClure –  
that's good yelling!

& fuck the Past and all punctuation and spelling!

yeah, rhyme is

far better left to those effeminate limeys.

Old Blakey

was a throbbing poet-guru and no mistakey,

like me – bearded –  
and he saw the cockeyed world like no other seer did  
They don't dig, son,  
though there are traces of Early American in old Geoff  
Grigson,  
a few imitators  
have raised the Stars and Stripes among those  
masturbators –  
but don't bet on it,  
most of those creeps are still writing the fucking Sonnet!

As a scene it's crappy –  
no wonder those faggy Britlits are so unhappy  
The parameters  
only allow them to get high on iambic pentameters –  
if A-M-E-R-I-C-A  
went down on them with a passio hysterica  
they'd be so excited  
their cocksucking pin-striped pants would get ignited!  
They'd be creaming  
with continuous wall-to-wall high-pitched screaming!

Don't dig Dallas,  
don't dig Zukovsky's improvements to Catullus,  
don't dig Berryman,  
get hooked on the novels of H Seton Merriman –  
believe me, buddy,  
if they tried (and they do try) they couldn't be more  
fuddy-duddy  
It's overshoes and mufflers  
for that bunch of arthritic motherfucking snufflers  
AMERICA, be up and doing!  
let's take a goddam trip, let's get Star-screwing!

## *Pastoral*

Dominic Francis Xavier Brotherton-Chancery  
had an egg for breakfast every morning  
and revelled in obsolete forms. For example  
he called an eclogue an eglog (like the Elizabethans).  
He went everywhere on a bicycle. He knew very well  
that ordinary people had never heard of an eclogue.  
How he despised them! When his rough friend  
made savage fun of Gerald Manley Hopkins,  
jokingly speaking of 'The Burglar's First Communion'  
and hinting at the lust concealed in a work called 'Hairy  
Ploughman',  
although he giggled Dominic was shocked –  
such a lack of Faith! But what he loved in his friend  
was exactly the shaggy goat-footed Philistine roughness,  
it made *him* seem at least twice as cultivated.  
His coarse moustache was an animal temptation.  
His coltish clumsiness – oh, Dominic adored!  
They were both shepherds. His mother was a nymph.  
The shepherdesses lived in a different valley.  
He literally wanted (as Gus guffawed)  
no part of them! Lithe on his bicycle  
he rode contented through a summer idyll.

# The Tree of Knowledge

*'They tell you about love and romance, and then the first thing you see is this huge purple thing '*

Disillusioned girl, quoted in an article on Rape by Katharine Whitehorn, *The Observer*, 1 June 1975

That dubious *They*  
means teachers – not seducers in the hay,  
presumably,  
sweet-talkers with one hand above the knee  
Those magazines  
that tell of love and husbands, with such scenes  
censored right out –  
they cause some trouble, there can be no doubt  
Romantic songs  
feature a world all right, without such wrongs,  
and everything  
that tells girls happiness lies in a ring,  
religions, too,  
prepare with ignorance of what is blue,  
rustic and worse,  
and bring their own particular kind of curse

Hear Virtue's yelp!  
But crying 'Wicked!' doesn't really help.  
The growing boys  
see girls as objects, not much more than toys,  
experiment  
belongs to youth, as hops belong to Kent  
And circumstance  
alters each case, a man who takes his chance  
need not be bad,  
an untouched girl can end up very sad  
While Nature too  
has put a Life Force into me and you  
that has no use  
for morals either (this is no excuse,  
but does explain) –  
though one quick pleasure causes so much pain

Mind-readers grow  
after a time instinctively to know,  
one must suppose,  
which girls, and when, want to take off their clothes;  
being roughly wooed  
some find enjoyable as well as crude.

What is offence  
to one could be another's commonsense –  
don't get me wrong,  
I'm certainly not bursting into song  
in praise of rape,  
so brutal in its every form or shape.  
I sympathize  
with that sour girl; the sight that met her eyes  
could cause alarm  
to unbriefed virgins – but for some has charm.

Illusions can't  
keep out experience, a maiden aunt  
Life never was.  
But nor can Reason, with its wise 'because',  
soften the blow  
entirely; yet it's surely best to know  
what to expect?  
Erectile tissue loves to stand erect  
(in women too),  
it shouldn't come at you out of the blue.  
Someone should *tell*,  
before the scuffling and that outraged yell;  
an educated guess  
as to which man thinks No's a disguised Yes  
can't come amiss.

To save us all from articles like this.

## *Hereward the Weak*

Hereward Holyoak was a not inconsiderable twithound,  
he lived in Marsh Road, not so far from the Gas Works,  
and was (as it were mentally) monarch of all he surveyed  
He never went for exciting rides on the bodies of girls,  
though he made a few journeys on the naughty 69 bus  
The office he worked in seemed to be run by the Romans  
(not even the Danes), of Gadwine and Stigand,  
Bishop Aegelwine and Saint Sexburga he knew nothing  
He was neither a berserker, a brain-hewer, nor a sea-thief  
and the only Norman he knew was called Norman  
Pringle

He had no wife called Torfrida, brought back from  
Flanders,  
and certainly not a second wife called Aelfryth  
If Doreen Upminster looked at him, he blushed  
The tea-ladies thought he was a nice boy but backward  
He was never a victim of the blandishments of Alftruda,  
none of his enemies were cloven to the chine –  
though he once gave Mr Robinson a dirty look  
He never, ever, ate cormorant pie

Is it better to be like this, I wonder,  
than to bugger up the life-style of the Isle of Ely?

## *'It's Hard to Dislike Ewart'*

– *New Review* critic

I always try to dislike my poets,  
it's good for them, they get so uppity otherwise,  
going around thinking they're little geniuses –  
but sometimes I find it hard They're so pathetic  
in their efforts to be *liked*



When we're all out walking on the cliffs  
it's always pulling my coat with 'Sir! Oh, Sir!'  
and 'May I walk with *you*, Sir?' –  
I sort them out harshly with my stick.

If I push a few over the edge, that only  
encourages the others. In the places of preferment  
there is room for just so many.  
The rest must simply lump it.  
There's too much sucking up and trying to be clever.  
They must all learn they'll never get round *me*.  
Merit has nothing to do with it. There's no way  
to pull the wool over my eyes, *no* way,  
*no* way. . .

## *Variations and Excerpts*

*('Ballocky Bill The Sailor')*

Who's that crepitating with his knuckledusters on my  
portico?

Who's the man aggressifying his digits on my doorbox?

Who is the person terrifying the nightwood with his  
fistfuls?

cried the beauteous young virgin

(called the youthful female winner of Beauty Prizes)

(enunciated the scarcely mature attractive lady)

It is only I from the mighty recesses of Ocean, cried  
William the Mightily-testiculated Mariner

(At your service, my Lady, from the scaly squadrons'  
lair, intimated Guglielmo, the Man of Parts, the  
Seafarer)

(Here I am after a rough crossing, said Willie the Well-  
endowed Water-wanderer

I will descend then and admit you  
I'll go below and allow you up  
'Tis I will sink that you may rise  
    cried the freshly formed teenage trollop  
    (lisped her lovely under-twenty Ladyship)  
    (opined the new slick chick)

I am ancient and rugose and a stranger to the bath and yet  
    vigorous, yelled Will the Well-hung Matelot  
(Many summers have I seen, my skin is no longer  
    smooth, nor is it sanitate, but I maintain my strength,  
    cracked Billy the Ballsy Bo'sun)  
(No more am I youthful, my manners are crude, I am not  
    well-washed, but I am nevertheless full of energy,  
    explained Guillaume the Big-balled Waterman)

## *Four Variations*

Esmeraldo could hear Cloalda singing, down in the  
    patio

'A girl like de cocktalk!

A girl like de suckfuck'

It was an old tune from the Twenties ('Then I'll be  
    happy'),

and it carried with it emotional 'overtones'

Green could hear Chlo humming, alone in the yard

'Mm mm mm mm mm mm'

Mm mm mm mm mm mm'

He recognized it as part of a new album by the Frigs  
(*'Squaw Talk'*) He really dug it – like crazy

moles in their eccentric electricity. Simple but sincere, since here and there they cannot even (odd though it may seem) articulate, they are dumb before their sharers, wistfully waiting for the randy reader who could pick them up and enjoy them. Some far-flung wharfinger, some tough sailor in a rough jersey – Lili Marlen is their professional prototype. *Stop me and buy one* their mutilated motto, as they salaciously solicit, standing beneath some unlimp lamp-post, wank-winking: *Come under the covers – come off!*

## *The Semantic Limerick According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1933)*

There existed an adult male person who had lived a relatively short time, belonging or pertaining to St John's,\* who desired to commit sodomy with the large web-footed swimming birds of the genus *Cygnus* or subfamily *Cygninae* of the family *Anatidae*, characterized by a long and gracefully curved neck and a majestic motion when swimming.

So he moved into the presence of the person employed to carry burdens, who declared: 'Hold or possess as something at your disposal my female child! The large web-footed swimming-birds of the genus *Cygnus* or subfamily *Cygninae* of the family *Anatidae*, characterized by a long and gracefully curved neck and a majestic motion when swimming, are set apart, specially retained for the Head, Fellows and Tutors of the College!'

\* A College of Cambridge University.

## *The Semantic Limerick According to Dr Johnson's Dictionary (Edition of 1765)*

There existed a person, not a woman or a boy, being in the first part of life, not old, of St John's,\* who wished to ——— the large water-fowl, that have a long and very straight neck, and are very white, excepting when they are young (their legs and feet being black, as are their bills, which are like that of a goose, but something rounder, and a little hooked at the lower ends, the two sides below their eyes being black and shining like ebony)

In consequence of this he moved step by step to the one that had charge of the gate, who pronounced 'Possess and enjoy my female offspring! The large water-fowl, that have a long and very straight neck, and are very white, excepting when they are young (their legs and feet being black, as are their bills, which are like that of a goose, but something rounder, and a little hooked at the lower ends, the two sides below their eyes being black and shining like ebony), are kept in store, laid up for a future time, for the sake of the gentlemen with Spanish titles '

### *Sonnet: Daffodils*

Wordsworth really loved daffodils. He said they were flashers. Certainly they must be the most exhibitionistic flowers there are, trumpeting their presence in yellow – by far the most visible colour.

\* A College of Cambridge University

I grant that after a long hard winter  
it's warming to see snow-drops and crocuses in that iron  
earth  
and the very first daffodils (what a cliché) seem a  
resurrection,  
something it even seems appropriate to make a fuss  
about.  
They look so perfect, though a bit self-conscious.

After a week or two, however, when Spring is  
established,  
and everywhere you look there are oceans of daffodils  
as arrogant as pop stars, they begin to seem ordinary.  
You take them for granted. Like a love affair fading  
they shrivel and go crinkly, papery and tired.  
The Spring too (teenagers witness) has its own kind of  
boredom

## *Sonnet: Brief Encounter*

Did we really make that journey to Northampton?  
In pursuit of that coloured abortionist who did the first  
one?  
He was very nice, you said, and had a cocktail cabinet,  
and seemed clean. Two children, you said,  
were quite enough for one lifetime – though I don't think  
any  
of this did you much good, physically. I waited an hour  
in the Station buffet. Then you came back, suffering  
a state of shock, shivering. I bought you a whisky.

I did some shoe advertising once for a firm in  
Northampton  
Northampton is where they make shoes They're  
fertility symbols  
(think of the old woman who lived in a shoe)  
They're wombs and vaginas 'Something you put your  
foot in'  
I remember hearing a psychiatrist, once, say  
You felt very cold, in the train back to London

### *Sonnet: At the Villa Madeira*

So I sit here, in a comfortable chair, waiting  
for the three bangs on the head with a wooden mallet  
that will auction me, as it were, to Eternity  
I wear my long nightcap (nearly a bottle of whisky)  
each night – and, later, a conventional Counsel  
will call me a *mari complaisant*, something not very nice  
But really I neither know nor care what they get up to  
I was successful, and now I'm very depressed

We get on well enough, with friendliness  
The times are bad (the times are always bad),  
I sleep downstairs We drink a bit – that's true  
I'm 67, she's 38, and he's 18  
These are all dangerous ages Hypocrites in wigs  
will make us ogres, who prove the power of love

## Sonnet: *Wise Sir Bowgentle*

*'Although he smiled, his eyes were fearful and his face had aged much since Hawkmoon had last seen him – wise Sir Bowgentle, the philosopher-poet.'*

MICHAEL MOORCOCK, *The Mad God's Amulet*.

He sounds a genuine phoney – to use an oldfashioned term.

It's not good for poets to fancy themselves as philosophers

(one reason why Auden was the best English poet since Pope).

Tennyson did himself a lot of harm by pondering;  
the bromides of the Chorus are not the highspots of  
Greek Tragedy

Politics too can bemuse the adept versifier.

Pound really believed he could have stopped Pearl  
Harbor

if he had gotten to the Japanese poets in time.

When the Bard, the Singer, is stuck there in front of the  
microphone

he makes mood music; he can't solve things for always –  
all he can give is a certain amount of pleasure.

There still is an actual something we like to call Reality,  
not much affected by our pretty words,  
that mocks us with its Woody Woodpecker laugh.

## Sonnet: How Life Too is Sentimental

When our son was a few weeks old he had bronchial trouble  
and picked up a cross-infection in the hospital  
(salmonella typhimurium) through sluttish feeding –  
but a hospital never admits it's responsible –  
and was rushed away behind glass in an isolation ward,  
at the point, it might be, of death Our daughter,  
eighteen months old, was just tall enough  
to look into his empty cot and say 'Baby gone'

A situation, an action and a speech  
so tear-jerking that Dickens might have thought of them –  
and indeed, in life, when we say 'It couldn't happen'  
almost at once it happens And the word 'sentimental'  
has come to mean exaggerated feeling  
It would have been hard to exaggerate *our* feelings then

## Sonnet: Gulls

The old writers called somebody easily fooled 'a gull'  
Gulls never look credulous simpletons to me  
On the contrary they seem hard and rapacious  
with beady eyes alert for the main chance,  
more likely to do the conning than be conned,  
while that horrible sex maniac's laugh they have  
(one of the species is *cachinnans*, I believe)  
is enough to upset anyone with a hangover.



‘The probable sense was “wailer” from its cry’  
say my *Shorter Oxford* (Breton *goelaff*, to weep).  
Doctor Johnson, of the tricky verb,  
says ‘from *guiller*, to cheat, Old French’,  
the *Shorter Oxford*, cagey: ‘of doubtful origin’.  
This sounds more like the birds. *They* look real bastards.

## Sonnet: *The Womansmell of Sex*

It’s interesting how the sexual smell of women,  
when they are excited by the touching of their lovers,  
has never found its way into romantic literature  
(nor, for that matter, into any other literature).  
One poem by Donne. I can’t think of much else.  
The taboo must be very strong. Even pornography  
describes visual and tactile but not the olfactory.  
Some readers would go mad if it were even mentioned.

Of course, you can’t describe a smell. Yet even  
hypocrites  
would admit that for a man in love  
this is an important factor in the physical attraction.  
It should have, as it were, at least a footnote.  
People don’t like admitting that they’re animals –  
they turn their minds away from the fact and its proving.

## *Sonnet: Shakespeare's Universality*

In one sense Shakespeare's 'universality' was accidental – due to the fact that he wrote plays. When you have so many characters

you're bound to have so many views of human life. Nobody can say 'Why are all your poems about moles?' or tell you you're very limited in your subject matter. A playwright's material (unless it's outrageously slanted) usually deals with a group of opinions, people can never say

'Of course this play is entirely autobiographical.'

It's interesting that Shakespeare's Sonnets, which are (I think we can't doubt) completely based on his life, are by a long way his least satisfactory verse. It's better for a writer, in most cases, to get out and about. If he gets stuck in his own psyche for too long he bores everybody – and that includes himself.

## *Sonnet: Afterwards*

When I am gone, the whole satirical setup will carry on as before – into the foreseeable future. The world will fill itself like a basin of water with all the archetypes. The lonely, the mother-fixated, the psychopaths, the deviants. The big superstitious religions will enrol from birth their thousands and tens of thousands. The smug, the respected, the cheer-leaders, the purse-proud. People will still believe it is right to kill people.

I shall have done little enough to improve the cosmos –  
my political influence nil, my personal kindness  
only a drop in an ocean where already the children  
are born who will commit the next century's murders,  
my love so transient it's pathetic. They'll say (if I'm  
lucky):

He wrote some silly poems, and some of them were  
funny.

# Index

Untitled poems are indexed under their first lines, set in *italic type*

- A Bad Moment, 169
- Abelam, 210
- A Black Rabbit Dies for its Country, 205
- A Christmas Message, 134
- A Cup Too Low, 172
- A Dialogue between the Head and Heart, 248
- Adolescent Agonies, 314
- A Double View, 305
- A Dream, 283
- After Heine, 83
- After the Sex-bomb, 143
- Afterwards, 405
- 'A Good Mouse Needs No Preparation', 385
- A Guttural FrAGMENT, 197
- A Handful of People, 154
- All Brave Men are Slightly Stupid, 191
- A Music Lover, 83
- A Mystery?, 177
- & Son, 218
- A New Poet Arrives, 192
- An Extended Apostrophe to John Hatch Clark, a Comrade Both Ancient and Modern, 302
- Anniversary, 167
- An Old Song, 132
- Anti-poem, 121
- A Partly Smoked Cigar, 165
- A Passionate Woman, 365
- A Personal Footnote, 329
- A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of Edgar Mittelholzer, 197
- Arithmetic, 193
- A Sectarian View, 233
- A Secular Saint, 133
- At the Villa Madeira 401
- Audenesque for an Initiation, 23
- A Very Shocking Poem Found among the Papers of an Eminent Victorian Divine, 333
- A Warning, 143
- A War of Independence, 164
- Away Games, 235
- A Wee Sang for St Andrew's Day, 382
- A Woman's World, 195
- Barbary, 127
- Bear Thoughts, 343
- Beginnings, 174
- Be Satisfied With What You Have, 284
- Birds have their feet in air*, 21
- Books, 238
- Breathing but not believing*, 22
- Brief Encounter, 400
- 'Brilliant Spy and Totally Inadequate Man', 360
- British Guiana, 84
- Businesslike, 177
- Cambridge, 51
- Carson McCullers, 342
- Cat Cruelty, 285
- Cat Logic, 285
- Characters of the First Fifteen 18
- Charles Augustus Milverton, 292
- Chelsea in Winter, 86
- Cigarette for the Bambino, 77
- Classical Disasters, 185
- Cleft for Me, 244
- Climactenc, 131
- Concert in Leighton House, 240
- Consoler Toujours, 274
- Couples 186
- Crossing the Bar 137
- Daddyo 178
- Daffodils, 399
- Daisy from Bunny, 359
- Days of Contempt 67
- Dean Swift Watches Some Cows 225

- Diary of a Critic, 162  
 Disciple, 196  
 Disturbing Incident at the  
   Recreation Ground, 139  
 Dollfuss Day, 1935, 38  
*Don't worry, poetry won't be as good  
   as that again in a hurry!*, 355  
 Doo Bist Dee Roo, 284  
 Dream of a Slave, 129  
  
 Earl's Court, 108  
 Eight Awful Animals, 146  
 Election Song, 1935, 41  
 Ella Mi Fu Rapital, 208  
 Ending, 310  
 Eternal Triangle, 168  
 Existences, 187  
 Experience Hotel, 268  
 Extravagance, 80  
  
 Falls, 184  
 Fed Up and Going Down, 64  
 Fiction: A Message, 271  
 Fiction: The Definite Article, 273  
 Fiction: The House Party, 270  
 Fifteen Days in a Banana Skin, 187  
 For Lord John Roxton, 257  
 For Samuel Palmer, 291  
 For Whom the Bell Tolls, 75  
 Found!, 266  
 Four Variations, 395  
 From a Well-Wisher, 299  
*From mass of enemies, group of  
   friends*, 66  
 From the Phrase Book, 231  
 From V C. (a Gentleman of  
   Verona), 256  
  
 Gentlemen v. Players, 167  
 Georgic, 199  
 Gnomes, 186  
 Going To, 263  
 Gulls, 403  
  
 Hands, 183  
 Harrods, 100  
 Hearing the Love Note, 251  
 Hereward the Weak, 393  
  
*He thought of being in a single room,*  
   33  
 Home, 69  
 Home Truths, 356  
 How Life Too is Sentimental, 403  
 How Tragedy is Impossible, 371  
 Huckstep, 85  
 Hurried Love, 245  
 Hyde Park Corner, 113  
 Hymn, 183  
 Hymn to Proust, 82  
  
 Ian, 157  
 If, 265  
 In a Block of Flats, 176  
 In and Out the Dusty Bluebells,  
   125  
 Incident, Second World War, 308  
 In the Saloon Bar, 250  
 Intimations of Mortality in the  
   Lower Richmond Road, 239  
 Is there Life after Sex?, 327  
 'It's Hard to Dislike Ewart', 393  
  
 Jazz Song, 49  
 Jerzy, 156  
 John Betjeman's Brighton, 70  
 June 1966, 170  
  
 Last Movements, 318  
 Leaving Leeds, 386  
 Lepidoptera, 132  
 Lifelines, 182  
 Lifetime, 232  
 Limericks, 334  
 Lines, 181  
 Lines of History, 185  
 Literary Unions, 229  
 Looking for Books, 320  
 Love Song, 198  
  
 Madame Tussaud's, 93  
 Mad Nature, 344  
 Magic, 192  
 Malthusian, 341  
 Manifesto, 164  
 Mater's Whistle-stop Beauty, 396  
 Memory Man, 252  
 Miss Twye, 64

Mother Love, 340  
 Moving on, 211  
*My friend is far, his assurance and  
 despondency*, 32  
  
 Nameless, 173  
 Nasty, 346  
 Nature, 286  
 Nightflight, 290  
 No Flowers by Request, 22  
 Notes on the Way, 169  
 Nymphs and Satyrs, 194  
  
 Objects, 184  
 Office Friendships, 153  
 Office Primitive, 195  
 Officers' Mess, 73  
*O girl beneath the exploring hand*, 49  
 Oh, Darling!, 372  
*O listen to the band excite the dancers*,  
 65  
 One, 344  
 One for the Anthologies, 20  
 'One Incomprehensible', 19  
 On Seeing a Priest Eating Veal,  
 154  
 On the Author's Photograph, 26  
 On the Death of an Unpleasant  
 Executive, 213  
 On the Tercentenary of Milton's  
 Death, 369  
 Orchestra, 288  
 Oxford Leave, 76  
  
 Park Lane, 111  
 Pastoral, 390  
 People Will Say We're in Love, 214  
 Perchance a Jealous Foe, 375  
 Phallus in Wonderland 10  
 Pi-Dog and Wish-Cat, 161  
 Poem before Sleep, 34  
 Poetry is the Dustbin of the  
 Emotions, 234  
 Poets, 312  
 Political Poem 44  
 Prisoner of Love, 175  
 Professor Otto Lidenbrock to  
 Wystan Hugh Auden 303  
 Pros 397

Public School, 25  
 Pushing the Boat Out, 247  
  
 Queering the Pitch, 237  
  
 Rain - No Play, 311  
 Reading Keats on Holiday at a  
 Rented Flat in Saltdean, 261  
 Red in Tooth and Claw, 342  
  
 Salzburg Festival City, 40  
 Sandra, 154  
 Secrets of the Alcove, 139  
 Senility, 347  
 Sentimental Blues, 36  
 Sentimental Journeys, 237  
 September Cricket, 1975, 361  
 Serious Matters, 122  
 78s, 130  
 S F (Vienna, 1901), 124  
 Shakespeare, 352  
 Shakespeare's Universality, 405  
*she shouting pigshit on the american  
 books*, 191  
 Short Story, 199  
 Short Time, 125  
 So Far, 175  
 Soho, 102  
 Soho and West, Saturday  
 Morning, 233  
 Some Second Ghest to  
 Entertainee?, 179  
 Song - *For the island that's not on the  
 chart*, 31  
 Song - *The famous fascist, night*, 37  
 Song - *Acts of anger, not acts of love*,  
 40  
 Song - *The waves of tenderness beat  
 still*, 48  
 Sonnet - *We make mistakes, my  
 darling, all the time*, 74  
 Sonnet - *Armies, like homes once  
 hated, feed and clothe* 75  
 Sonnet A Dream 283  
 Sonnet Afterwards, 405  
 Sonnet A Sectarian View, 233  
 Sonnet At the Villa Mairea 401  
 Sonnet Away Games, 235  
 Sonnet Bear Thou his, 343

- Sonnet: Be Satisfied with What You Have, 284
- Sonnet. Books, 238
- Sonnet: Brief Encounter, 400
- Sonnet: Carson McCullers, 342
- Sonnet: Cat Cruelty, 285
- Sonnet: Cat Logic, 285
- Sonnet: Concert in Leighton House, 240
- Sonnet: Daffodils, 399
- Sonnet: Doo Bist Dee Roo, 284
- Sonnet: Gulls, 403
- Sonnet: How Life Too is Sentimental, 403
- Sonnet. Intimations of Mortality in the Lower Richmond Road, 239
- Sonnet: Lifetime, 232
- Sonnet: Mad Nature, 344
- Sonnet. Malthusian, 341
- Sonnet: Mother Love, 340
- Sonnet: Nasty, 346
- Sonnet. Nature, 286
- Sonnet: 1940, 72
- Sonnet: One, 344
- Sonnet: Poetry is the Dustbin of the Emotions, 234
- Sonnet: Queering the Pitch, 237
- Sonnet: Red in Tooth and Claw, 342
- Sonnet: Senility, 347
- Sonnet: Sentimental Journey, 237
- Sonnet. Shakespeare's Universality, 405
- Sonnet. Soho and West, Saturday Morning, 233
- Sonnet: The Days and Nights to Come, 236
- Sonnet. The Knowledge of Good and Evil, 340
- Sonnet: The Last Things, 241
- Sonnet: The Only Emperor is the Emperor of Ice Cream, 240
- Sonnet: The Picture on the Packet, 282
- Sonnet: The Prize, 346
- Sonnet: The Womansmell of Sex, 404
- Sonnet: Tidying up, 345
- Sonnet: What is Needed, 235
- Sonnet: Wise Sir Bowgentle, 402
- South Audley Street I, 105
- South Audley Street II, 106
- South Kensington, 88
- Spring, 138
- Spring Song, 80
- Strawberry Hill, 118
- Striptease, 123
- Summer Time Ends Today, 50
- Swarin Over, Death!, 319
- Tennysonian Reflection at Barnes Bridge, 87
- The Afterflu Afterlife, 259
- The Argument for the Benevolent God, 317
- The Back Streets of Fulham, 129
- The Black Box, 166
- The Blurb, 336
- The Bofors AA Gun, 72
- The Boss is Thinking, 215
- The Challenge to Interpretation, 212
- The Clarissa Harlowe Poem, 297
- The Conventional Love Song, 286
- The Cricket of my Friends, 331
- The Day of the Creator, 204
- The Days and Nights to Come, 236
- The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters, 180
- The Decomposition of Management, 171
- The Dell, 266
- The Dildo, 146
- The Dirtypot Decider, 140
- The Eight Suits, 189
- The Ella Wheeler Wilcox Woo, 374
- The English Wife, 45
- The Ewart Organization, 224
- The Fourth of May, 26
- The Fux, 148
- The Garden of the Clitorides, 170
- The Gentle Sex (1974), 348
- The Gods of the Copybook Headings, 367
- The Good Money, 136

- The Great Lines, 182  
 The Headlines, 188  
 The Hut, 289  
 The Illness of the Writer's Wife, 326  
 The Immense Advantage, 388  
 The Insex, 151  
 The Knowledge of Good and Evil, 340  
 The Lady Left Behind, 370  
 The Language of Love, 227  
 The Larkin Automatic Car Wash, 254  
 The Last Journey, 324  
 The Last Things, 241  
 The Law Allows Cruel Experiments on Friendly Animals, 134  
 The Legend of the Lustful Lozenges, 201  
 'The Lion grieves loped from the shade', 355  
 The Lover Complains, 242  
 The Lover Doesn't Complain, 248  
 The Lover Reflects Afterwards, 250  
 The Lover Reflects Hearts That We Broke Long Ago Have Long Been Breaking Others, 245  
 The Lover Reflects on Consolation Prizes, 249  
 The Lover Writes a Heterosexual Lyric, 246  
 The Lover Writes a One-word Poem, 249  
 The Marble Arch, 110  
 The Masturbon, 146  
 The Middle Years, 128  
 The Muse, 174  
 The Museum of British Transport (Clapham), 115  
 The Mystery of Edwin Drood, 258  
 The Noble English Traveller Contemplates Turkish Delight, 384  
 The Odes of Horace - Book I 37, 277, Book II 14, 279, Book II 20, 280 Book III 1 281  
 The Old Ladies, 39  
 The One-time Three-Quarter Remembers the Past, 324  
 The Only Emperor is the Emperor of Ice Cream, 240  
 The Paling of the Clerds, 194  
 The Panteebra, 147  
 The Picture on the Packet, 282  
 The Price of Things, 363  
*The primal stone of the sheep-walls of Yorkshire, the iron cross hard to the hand*, 21  
 The Prize, 346  
 The Pseudo-Demetrius, 209  
 The Real and Unreal, 179  
 The Return of the Hero, 322  
 The Reviewing of Poetry, 380  
 The Screen, 264  
 The Sea-pig, 206  
 The Second Coming, 325  
 The Select Party, 219  
 The Semantic Limerick According to Dr Johnson's Dictionary (Edition of 1765), 399  
 The Semantic Limerick According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1933), 398  
 The Sentimental Education, 220  
 The Sexy Airs of Summer, 230  
 The Short Fat Poem, 217  
*The smells of autumn and its solemn brown*, 43  
 The Song, 217  
 The Spiroject, 152  
 The Statements, 187  
 The Stufalo, 149  
 The Tercentenary of Milton's Death, 369  
 The Theory of the Leisure Class, 307  
 The Thirties Love Lyric, 379  
 The Tree of Knowledge, 391  
 The Twelve Slogans, 190  
 The Village Dragon, 52  
 The Woman's mell of Sex, 404  
 The Word-Bird, 150  
 The Young Seduction Poem 225  
*Though what I think is hardly new* 29



- Thriller, 203  
 Tidying up, 345  
 Tiger Rag, 144  
 Tittle-tattle of an Emotional Dwarf, 126  
 To a Plum-Coloured Bra Displayed in Marks & Spencer, 243  
*To go, to leave the classics and the buildings*, 34  
 To Lord Byron, 336  
 Too Little Care of This, 251  
 To the Dead, 366  
 To the Gentle One, 253  
 To the Muses, 81  
 To the Slow Drum, 275  
 To the Virgins, to Make the Most of Time, 141  
 Tourneur out of Touch, 287  
 Trafalgar Day, 1972, 268  
 True Love, 358  
 2001 The Tennyson-Hardy Poem, 226  
  
 Ursula, 158  
  
 Vacancy, 299  
 Valediction: To the Cricket Season, 338  
 Variation on a Theme of A Huxley, 163  
 Variation on a Theme of K Amis, 162  
 Variations and Excerpts, 394  
 Venus, 300  
 Venus in Furs, 172  
 Verse from an Opera, 52  
  
 Victorian, 216  
  
 Wanting Out, 123  
 Warm to the Cuddly-toy Charm of a Koala Bear, 137  
 War-time, 145  
 Weaslingham, 155  
*We follow lives that twist like woodland paths*, 45  
*We see in parks the children of the rich*, 35  
*We who were together shall now be apart*, 36  
 What is needed, 235  
 What it is, 368  
 When a Beau Goes In, 78  
 William McGonagall on England's Failure to Qualify for the World Cup, 1974, 328  
 William Wordsworth (1770-1850), 329  
 Wise Sir Bowgentle, 402  
 Witchcraft, 135  
 Writing the Poems of Loss, 242  
  
 Xmas for the Boys, 202  
  
 Yeats and Shakespeare, 316  
 Yorkshiremen in Pub Gardens, 314  
 Young, 160  
 Young Blondes, *A religious poem*, 79  
  
 Zeg's Fire Stick Spits Tremendous Power, 142

